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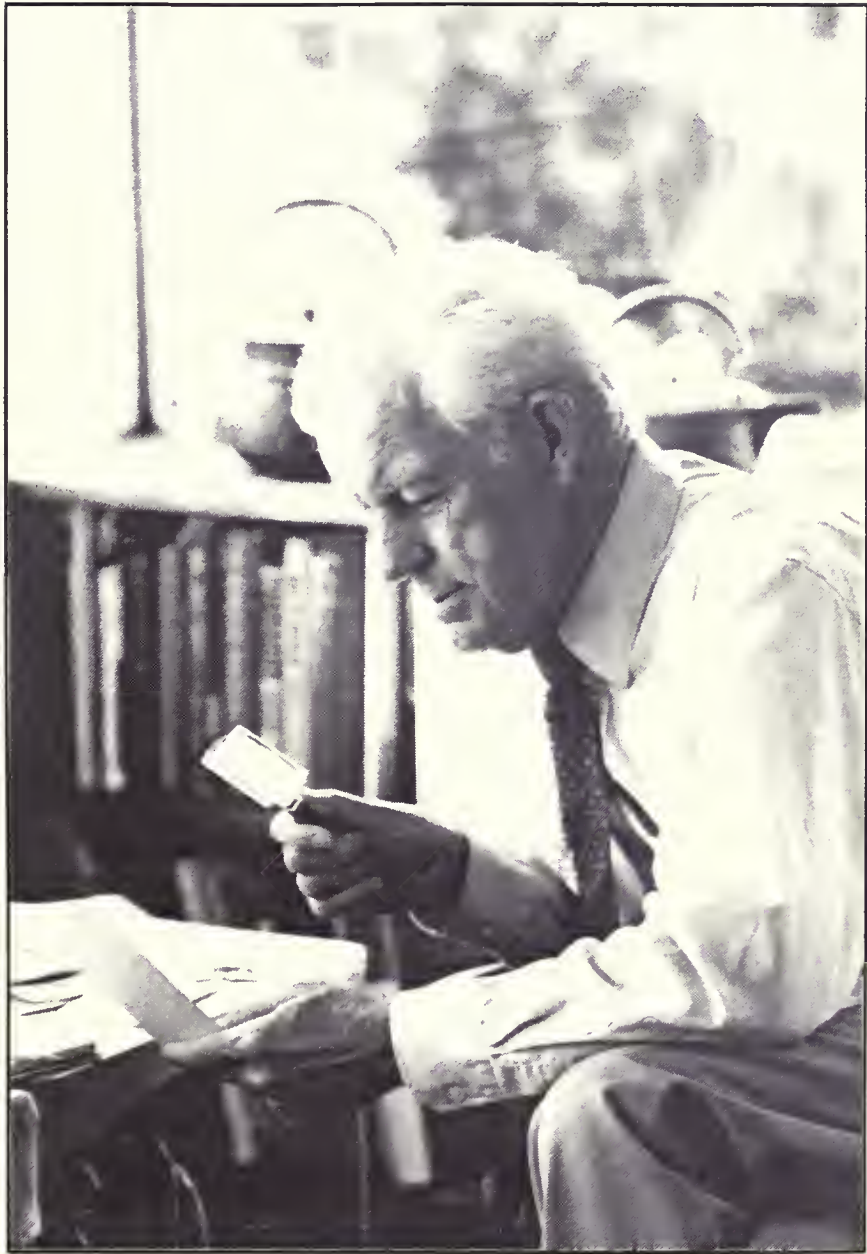
University of California
Berkeley, California

ON THE WATERFRONT:
AN ORAL HISTORY OF RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA

John A. Vincent, Jr.

RECOLLECTIONS OF FERRY POINT, RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA

An Interview Conducted by
Judith K. Dunning
in 1985



JOHN A. VINCENT, JR.

Photograph by Judith K. Dunning, 1986

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INTRODUCTION by Jim Quay

It is a great pleasure to introduce "On the Waterfront" to you. I myself was introduced to the project in September 1983, shortly after becoming executive director of the California Council for the Humanities. Both the Council and its mission of bringing the humanities to out-of-school adults were relatively new to me when Judith Dunning came to my office to talk about her proposal. Ms. Dunning wanted to document an important period in the life of the Richmond, California waterfront, but she didn't want to write a study for scholars. Instead, she proposed to interview most of the oldest surviving waterfront figures, collect historic photographs of the port and its workers, and to create from these an exhibit for the public. Would the Council be interested in supporting such a project?

Happily, the two dozen scholars and citizens who sat on the Council then were interested and, convinced of the project's importance, voted to fund Ms. Dunning's proposal in early 1984. Six years later, I now know what I couldn't have known then: that "On the Waterfront" had all the features of a typical public humanities project: a powerful subject, caring scholars, a resourceful and dedicated project director, and uncertain funding.

You can appreciate why even the best public humanities project--and "On the Waterfront" is one of the best--doesn't easily attract funding. In a state focused relentlessly on the future, the next quarterly statement, the next development, the value of such a project doesn't show up in a cost-benefit analysis. Who would care about the lives of Californians past? Who would care about a waterfront whose boomtime is passed?

The answer is: thousands of people, as Judith's project proved. First and foremost, Judith, who didn't just study Richmond, but moved to and lived in Richmond. Like so many project directors, she gave time and life to this project far beyond the amount budgeted. In the language of accounting this is called "in-kind contribution"; in the language of life it's called devotion. Those of us privileged to know Judith know that the project both exhausted her and enriched her, and she has won the admiration of those who supported her and the affection of those she has interviewed and worked with.

After Judith came a handful of interested scholars--historian Chuck Wollenberg, folklorist Archie Green, and oral historian Willa Baum--who gave their time and expertise to the project. Next, a handful of people at organizations like CCH, Chevron and Mechanics Bank, who thought enough of the idea to fund it. Finally, eventually, came the thousands of visitors to Richmond Festival by the Bay during 1985-87 and saw the photographs and read the excerpts from interviews and realized that they too cared about these people. And now, you, the reader of these interviews, have an opportunity to care.

In its fifteen years of supporting efforts to bring the humanities to the out-of-school public in California, the Council has seen two great themes emerge in the projects it funds: community and diversity. "On the Waterfront" embodies both. I think such projects are compelling to us because in our busy lives, we often encounter diversity more as a threat than as a blessing, and community more as an absence than a presence.

"On the Waterfront" gives us all a chance to experience the blessings of diversity. The life details that emerge from these pictures and voices make us appreciate how much the people of the Richmond waterfront are unlike us, how much attitudes, economies, and working conditions have changed. Yet because the portraits are so personal and intimate, we can also recognize the ways in which they are like us, in their struggles, their uncertainties, their pride, and their fates. What seemed like difference becomes part of a greater sense of who "we" are.

In the lives of waterfront people, we can also glimpse how a community grew and waned. Busy with our own lives, we often neglect the activities that knit communities together. Judith Dunning's project allows us to see what we are losing and how communities are created and destroyed. And so, "On the Waterfront" fulfills the oldest promise of the humanities: that in learning about others, we learn about ourselves. For the gift of these twenty-six lives, we can thank Judith Dunning.

Jim Quay
Executive Director
California Council for the Humanities

March 2, 1990
San Francisco, California

PREFACE

ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

"On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," began in 1985. Interviews were conducted with twenty-six Bay Area residents including early Richmond families, World War II Kaiser Shipyard workers, cannery workers, fishermen, and whalers.

I was first attracted to this shoreline industrial town located sixteen miles northeast of San Francisco in 1982 while enrolled in a documentary photography class. For ten weeks I concentrated on the Richmond waterfront, often accompanying the crew of the freighter Komoku on its nightly run from Richmond to C & H Sugar in Crockett. It was then that I began to hear colorful stories of Richmond's waterfront and the City's World War II days.

The question which captivated me in 1982 and still does is--what happened to Richmond when World War II transformed this quiet working class town into a 24-hour-day industrial giant? With the entry of the Kaiser Shipyard, the number of employed industrial workers skyrocketed from 4,000 to 100,000. An unprecedented number of women entered the work force. The shipyards set speed and production records producing one-fifth of the nation's Liberty ships. By 1945 Richmond's shipyards had launched 727 ships.

There were other enormous changes. During the wartime boom, Richmond's population rose from 23,000 to 125,000. The ethnic composition of Richmond and the entire Bay Area changed dramatically with the influx of workers recruited from the South and Midwest. There was little time to provide the needed schools and community services. Housing shortages were critical. Twenty-four thousand units of war housing were built but they were soon filled to capacity. People were living in make-shift trailer camps along the roadsides and the all-night movie theaters were filled with sleeping shipyard workers.

James Leiby, professor of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley, called Richmond a "spectacular" case of urban development. What happened to other communities over a period of decades occurred in Richmond in a few years.

Some of the questions I wanted to explore in the interviews were--who were these newcomers to Richmond and were there reasons, beyond the promise of a job, which brought them in steady streams by trains, buses, and automobiles hauling make-shift trailers? And was this destination of Richmond, California, all that they had imagined?

Other questions were just as compelling. After the war ended and Kaiser and fifty-five other industries moved out of Richmond, leaving this new population suddenly unemployed, what made people stay? And for those who left Richmond and returned home to their families in the South and Midwest, what made them come back to Richmond a second time, often bringing relatives with them?

As intrigued as I was by this new population, I also wanted to know how Richmond natives experienced these changes. In a sense, as others moved in to find new homes in Richmond, the longtime residents were losing their once small and familiar home town.

Initially, I tried to locate people who were living and working in Richmond before the World War II boom. They worked in the canneries, at the Chevron Refinery, or made their living fishing in San Pablo Bay. Most of these first interviewees were California natives, born and raised in Richmond. But the majority of the interviewees for this project came from other places--Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Iowa, Idaho, Utah--all to start a new life in California. Each one had a story to tell. Armed with a tape recorder, a camera, and lots of unanswered questions, I set out to record these local residents.

INTERVIEW SETTING

With few exceptions, the initial interview took place at the narrator's home. Because I was recording a diverse group, the interview setting varied dramatically. One day I might be in a neighborhood where residents, fearing stray bullets, keep their curtains drawn and their lights dimmed. Another day I would be in a home with a sweeping view of the bay, built by a former cannery owner during the Depression.

When possible, I recorded additional interviews and photographed at locations where the narrators had lived or worked. Some of these included the former Filice and Perrelli Canning Company, Ferry Point, Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor, and the last remaining World War II shipyard structures...since torn down. I also spent many days off shore. When interviewing Dominic and Tony Ghio, fishermen for over sixty years, I accompanied them on dawn fishing trips in San Pablo Bay. However, following a turbulent twelve-hour whale watching excursion to the Farallon Islands with former whaler Pratt Peterson, I vowed to continue my research on land.

When I asked some project participants to give me a personalized tour of Richmond to see what landmarks were important to them, all too often I was shown vacant lots where a family home, church, or favorite cafe once stood. The downtown, once bustling with movie theaters, dance halls, and department stores, is eerily quiet for a city of 82,000. I found that local residents are still angry over the loss of their downtown district during the 1960s redevelopment era. Longtime residents spoke emotionally of the city losing its center. Hilltop Mall, built on the outskirts of town and accessible by automobile, was no substitute for a shopping district in the middle of town. The struggle to rebuild the downtown and to attract new businesses is an ongoing one for the City of Richmond.

After the interviewing was completed, there were photo sessions in the narrator's homes and former work places, as well as meetings in which we went through family albums and trunks. Some wonderful photographs and the stories behind them were uncovered during this process. Copies are included in the individual volumes.

PUBLIC USES OF THE ORAL HISTORIES

From the early stages of this project, both the text from the oral histories and the collection of photographs, have been used in community events. Examples include photo panels and maritime demonstrations at Richmond's Festival by the Bay, 1985, 1986, and 1987; and Oakland's Seafest '87. An exhibition, "Fishermen by Trade: On San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers," produced in collaboration with the Richmond Museum in 1988, was developed from the oral history interviews with Dominic and Tony Ghio.

In an effort to present the oral histories to the public in a form which retained the language, the dialects, and the flavor of the original interviews, I wrote "Boomtown," a play about the transformation of Richmond during World War II. "Boomtown" was produced by San Francisco's Tale Spinners Theater and toured Bay Area senior centers, schools, and museums in 1989.

A new direction for the oral histories is in the field of adult literacy. Nearly fifty years after the recruitment of men and women from the rural South and Midwest to work in the Kaiser shipyards, some former shipyard workers and many of their descendents are enrolled in LEAP, Richmond's adult literacy program, where the students range in ages from 16 to 85 and are 70 percent black.

Our current goal is to make a shortened, large print version of the oral history transcripts for use by adult literacy students and tutors. We think that by using the true stories of local residents as literacy text, there will be an additional incentive for adults learning to read. The characters in the oral histories are often their neighbors, friends, and families speaking in their own words on such topics as the Dust Bowl, the World War II migration of defense workers, waterfront industries, family and community life.

THANKS

"On the Waterfront" project has had many diverse layers, including the University of California, the advisory committee, a wide range of financial supporters, and of primary importance, a large group of interviewees. I want to thank all of the project participants who donated their time, enthusiasm, and memories to this project.

Special thanks is due Jim Quay, Executive Director of the California Council for the Humanities, who has been a source of good advice and inspiration from the beginning. The Council's grant in 1984 got the project off the ground, kicking off the campaign for matching funds. Jim Quay's counsel last summer set in motion the completion of the oral histories by introducing me to the California State Library grant programs.

Bay Area historian Chuck Wollenberg and labor folklorist Archie Green have been my primary advisors, as well as mentors, from the early planning stages. Chuck provided insight into how Richmond's transition during World War II fit into the larger picture of California history. Archie Green reinforced my belief that as chroniclers of history we must continue to document the lives of working people.

From the preliminary research to the completed project, Kathleen Rupley, curator of the Richmond Museum, has been enormously supportive. Working in collaboration with Kathleen, and Museum staff Paula Hutton and Joan Connolly on the "Fishermen by Trade" exhibition was an invigorating experience as well as an excellent example of how two organizations pooled their talents and resources to create a popular community event.

Stanley Nystrom, a Museum volunteer and lifelong Richmond resident, has been a continuing resource to me. A local history buff, with a great sense of detail, he assisted me often.

Finally, I want to thank Adelia Lines and Emma Clarke of the Richmond Public Library, Sharon Pastori of the LEAP program, and Rhonda Rios Kravitz and Gary Strong of the California State Library for their support in making possible the completion of these oral history volumes and their distribution to several Bay Area public libraries which serve minority populations.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In my work I am most interested in recording the stories of people who are undocumented in history and who are unlikely to leave written records behind. For me, the strength of this project has been seeing the transformation in how the interviewees view their relationship to history. They came a long way from our first contact when a typical response to my request for an interview was, "Why do you want to interview me?" or "What's important about my life?" And "Why Richmond?" With some encouragement, many became actively involved in the research and the collection of photographs, and began recommending others to be interviewed. "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," became their project, with a life of its own.

This set of oral histories is by no means the whole story of Richmond. It is one piece of its history and one effort to generate community-based literature. I hope that it will encourage others to record the stories, the songs, and the traditions of our community members. They have a lot to teach us.

Judith K. Dunning
Project Director

February 23, 1990
Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library
University of California
Berkeley, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

John A. Vincent, Jr.
(also known as Jay, Jack, and J.A.)

Mr. Vincent, a retired Chevron engineer and Bay activist, was recommended to me by Donna Roselius, former president of the Point Richmond Historical Association. It was clear from the start that I had found a serious candidate for an interview. I contacted him by phone and in the next mail I received his handwritten history of Ferry Point.

The main emphasis in Mr. Vincent's two interviews in April of 1985 are his family's relocation to California, from Tupelo, Oklahoma in the early 1920s, and his recollections of youth at Ferry Point. The first interview was taped at his home in Richmond, and the second was conducted on site at Ferry Point.

Jay Vincent's father, a former schoolteacher and businessman, traveled to Hairpin, California in 1920 and found work with the San Joaquin Light and Power Company. The family joined him in 1921 following a train ride from Oklahoma to Fresno, California. Jay recalled the picnic baskets filled with fried chicken, canned goods, and cakes and the one dollar spending money for the family of four. As Jay told me, "This was to give you an idea of how poor people were, and how little there was in the way of currency available. When you got wiped out, you signed everything away to the bank and that was it."

In addition to a few trunks, and the shoe boxes filled with food, the Vincents carried The Book of Knowledge with them. Jay, who knew Oklahoma as a flat land, dreamed of other places by reading about them.

The parents, strongly dedicated to education, moved from Hairpin to Fresno to be near better schools and then to Richmond in 1923 where his father, a Santa Fe employee, was stationed at Ferry Point, the terminus for the transcontinental railroad.

The Vincent family lived at Ferry Point for thirteen years, much of that time residing in a converted boxcar next to the railroad track with sweeping views of Angel Island, Mount Tamalpais, and the San Francisco Bay. His mother planted a garden and Jay recalled fishing by drop line outside his door.

During childhood, Jay came to know the sloughs, beaches, and marshes of the Richmond waterfront. There were few fences and the shoreline was his front yard.

Today, Jay and his wife Barbara are strong advocates for public access to the Bay, reminding us that local residents have been fishing, strolling, and picnicking by the Bay since the turn of the century. They would like to see the installation of a fishing pier next to Terminal No.1 which could be the centerpiece for opening the whole stretch of shoreline between Terminal No.1 and the Santa Fe docks.

Some of the most revealing discussions in Jay Vincent's oral history came from a question I posed about "Okies." I asked if he felt an identification with them, even though his family arrived in California before the Dust Bowl and the World War II migration of shipyard workers from Oklahoma. He said, "Yes, because I had some of the same feelings. I realized what was going on with them because we had experienced that business of just being wiped out, with nothing, just nothing. There were no safety nets of any kind. People started moving out, looking for a better opportunity to make a go of it. I felt that you should give them credit for deciding to try to do something about their situation, that they had the courage to get up and leave."

Jay acknowledged that the "Okies" arrived in California in some unusual contraptions--make-shift trailers and old trucks, and beat-up cars. Jay told me, "I recall that period quite well because it brought back to me the feelings that we had, some of the early feelings that we had of being transplanted from one place to another."

During the years I have worked on this project, I have come to know Jay Vincent and Barbara Vincent, his wife of more than fifty years. We were among the daily swimmers at the Richmond Plunge, itself an historical landmark that the Vincents fought to preserve. They have also seen my ups and downs during the project--the excitement over a good interview, my nervousness in having my first play produced, and the hard work of raising money to continue the Richmond project. Informally, the Vincents have advised me on a number of community issues.

Given the funding, I would have recorded several more interviews with Jay and recorded Barbara too. As longtime community residents, who have chosen to see Richmond through its often rough transitions, they are valuable resources to the City. I am very glad that we had the opportunity to meet.

Judith K. Dunning
Project Director

January 31, 1990
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

Table of Contents -- J. A. Vincent

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------|----|
| Family Background | 1 |
| Stories of Tupelo, Oklahoma | 1 |
| Grandparents' Farming | 4 |
| Description of Mother | 5 |
| Religious Affiliation: The Baptist Church | 6 |
| Cotton, the Cash Crop | 7 |
| Farmers and Banks Go Broke | 7 |
| Father Moves West to Seek Work, 1920 | 9 |
| Family Reunites in Hairpin, California | 10 |
| Living in a Tent | 10 |
| California Dream and the Westward Movement | 11 |
| Parents' Emphasis on Education | 13 |
| Move to Fresno and Better Schools | 13 |
| Recollections of Fresno, Early 1920s | 15 |
| Picking Fruit in the Vineyards | 15 |
| Farmers' Market | 16 |
| Contact with Armenians | 16 |
| Schooling in Fresno: Music Appreciation | 17 |
| Family Relocates in Richmond, 1923 | 19 |
| Father Works for the Santa Fe Railroad | 19 |
| Memories of Train Ride from Oklahoma to California | 20 |
| Attitudes toward Oklahoma Migrants | 21 |
| Dorothea Lange Exhibit, New York, 1960s | 23 |
| Visits to Tupelo, Oklahoma | 25 |
| Reminiscences of Grandparents | 26 |
| Santa Fe Terminus at Ferry Point | 29 |
| Living in a Boxcar | 30 |
| The Silk Train | 33 |
| Hobbies of Youth | 34 |
| Building a Radio | 34 |
| Visiting the Point Richmond Library | 36 |
| Recollections of Point Richmond | 39 |
| Santa Fe Market | 39 |
| Keller's Beach | 40 |
| Richmond Natatorium | 41 |
| Spear Fishing | 42 |

Interview 2:

Onsite Interview at Ferry Point, Richmond, California

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| En Route to Ferry Point | 46 |
| Cozy Cove and Keller's Beach | 46 |
| Approaching Ferry Point on Foot | 49 |
| Terminal No. 1 | 50 |
| Dredging at Ferry Point and Its Effects on Keller's Beach | 52 |
| Ferry Loading Ramp | 53 |
| Early Ferry Boats: the <u>Ocean Wave</u> , <u>San Pablo</u> , and <u>San Pedro</u> | 55 |
| End of Ferry Era in San Francisco Bay | 56 |
| Views from Ferry Point | 57 |
| Angel Island | 58 |
| Raccoon Strait | 58 |
| California City: World War II Net Depot | 59 |
| Fire on the Loading Pier, Early 1980s | 61 |
| The Santa Fe Pumphouse and Boiler Room | 62 |
| Memories of Santa Fe Families Living at Ferry Point | 64 |
| Lumber Schooners | 67 |
| Striped Bass Waiting in the Shadow | 68 |
| Restoring a San Francisco Crab Boat | 70 |
| Fishing Boats at Point San Pablo | 71 |
| Controversy over Public Access | 72 |
| The Red Rock Warehouse Project | 72 |
| Swimming in Point Richmond | 74 |
| More on the Richmond Plunge (Natatorium) | 74 |
| Richmond Yacht Club | 76 |
| Petromark's Proposal to Build Storage Tanks | 77 |
| Proposed Shoreline Study | 78 |
| Brickyard Cove Area | 79 |
| Dialogue with Workman Putting up Fence Near Fishing Pier | 82 |

| | |
|------------|----|
| APPENDICES | 88 |
|------------|----|

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly or type. Use black ink.)

Your full name John A. Vincent Jr.

Date of birth Jan 18, 1912 Birthplace Tupelo, Oklahoma

Father's full name John Andrew Vincent

Occupation Teacher/Business/Engineer/Operator Birthplace Tennessee

Mother's full name Tressie Lee Cross

Occupation Housewife Birthplace Winfield, Scott Arkansas
date: 10-25-1887

Your spouse(s) Barbara Moore Vincent

Your children John Michael, Stephen Andrew, David Fredric
Christopher Albin

Where did you grow up? Oklahoma - 10 yrs, Fresno - 2 yrs, Richmond

When did your family first come to California? 1920

Reasons for coming when the price for "King Cotton" collapsed.
No future - farmers, merchants and the bank failed,

Present community Richmond How long? 65 years

Education (and training programs) B.S. Degree in Mechanical/Electrical Engineering
University of California, Berkeley

Occupation(s) Engineering assignments at Charron Research (10 yrs)
and Product Engineering in Charron's Corporate Staff - San Francisco.

continued on back page

Board of

Special interest or activities

Directors - East Brother Light Station, Richmond

Farmers Market, West Contra Costa YMCA • Member of Citizens For

Shoreline Parks, North Richmond Study Area. Continued interest in the
development of the Richmond Marine for people and small craft activities.
Ideas for improving Richmond's image.

What do you see for the future of Richmond?

Improving the City's image is addressed most aggressively during local political campaigns. New ordinances are passed, such as removing abandoned cars from the streets, weed abatement and removal of trash from front yards. Unfortunately, most of these are not enforced except when citizens complain to City Hall. What the City needs to do is establish an enforcement program to make the community ^{an} attractively satisfying place where citizens are proud to live and work.

The City has the physical components including the scenic amenities of both bay and valley location to become a handsome and livable ^{city}, rich in the social resources of a diverse population.

Success will be dependent upon the goals agreed on by the political leaders, business and industry with full support of the citizens goals toward which every segment of the City is willing to work.

I am optimistic -.

Family_Background

Stories of Tupelo, Oklahoma

[Interview 1: April 2, 1985]##

Dunning: What is your full name?

Vincent: John A. Vincent, Jr.

Dunning: What year were you born?

Vincent: Nineteen twelve.

Dunning: Where?

Vincent: Tupelo, Oklahoma.

Dunning: What about your parents, where were they born?

Vincent: In Missouri and Tennessee. My mother spent some time in Arkansas. My father came to Oklahoma when it was Indian territory, at the time it was becoming a state.

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended.

You often heard of the expression the "Sooners." They refer to their football teams as the Sooners. Those were the ones who jumped the official time when people could start moving into that Indian territory and establish claims. Some people got in ahead of time, and they referred to those as the Sooners. They were staking out claims ahead of time.

My father came to Oklahoma when he was a young man. He was a teacher for a period of time. A cyclone came along and tilted the one-room schoolhouse. He got a broken arm. He decided at that time that maybe he would like to be doing something else, so he got into business. He was a partner with a doctor in a small town hardware and farm implement business.

Dunning: This was in what town?

Vincent: This was in Tupelo. It's in the southern third of the state, and about two-thirds the distance from the west to the east. It's between two larger towns, Ada and Colgate. There was nothing but dirt roads in that area. There were no improved roads connecting the different towns. It was common practice for the merchants to shut down all operations one day each week. The merchants and farmers would go out and work on the roads, taking along dynamite to blow up the rocks. They kept working away to improve the roads.

They used mules and horses to drag these simple scoop-shaped scrapers that were held down by hand for scooping up the dirt and dumping it in other places. They often rode on top of these handles until they got a good load of dirt. The scoops were unloaded by flipping up on the handles and everything just dumped free when the scoop was upside down. That's one of my early recollections of the town that I lived in.

Dunning: When did your family first settle in that town?

Vincent: I don't recall just what year they settled there. They were there during World War I. I recall that I was delivering groceries for my dad when he had gone from the hardware store into a general merchandise store. During World War I, I was delivering for my dad. It was a busy time during that World War I period.

Dunning: You were pretty young at that time.

Vincent: I was quite young. I was perhaps eight or nine. It was a busy time. Actually, I wouldn't have been as old as I indicated there, because I was born in 1912, and World War I was over in 1918, so I was younger than that.

I was pretty young, dragging a little wagon around town. I was getting, as I recall, a quarter for those trips. At the post office, they had these stamps that you could buy for a quarter. I think they called them Liberty Stamps. You used to put them in a book. It was exciting to be able to go to the post office and buy Liberty Stamps. So I saved a few dollars from that.

I do recall at the end of the war, everyone wanted to celebrate. The way they celebrated in our town was to make a dummy of the Kaiser. It was hung right over the central crossroad in our town. There was a well there, too. People brought their rifles and started shooting the Kaiser. They had put a bottle of red ink in for a heart. Somebody hit that. It was a great day. They were all celebrating by taking out their vengeance upon this dummy, the Kaiser, at the end of World War I. I do recall that.

There was a blacksmith shop across the road from our home. On Halloween, I do recall seeing carriages, machinery, and wagons on top of the blacksmith shop. I still remember that as something that always amazed me.

I was so small, and to see those great big wagons all on top of the blacksmith shop was something I'll never forget.

Dunning: Where did your grandparents come from?

Vincent: The best I can develop is that they were Welsh, and there were some Scottish descendants there. It was never too clear. I never really got a good record. It seems that during those times, people didn't have many records. Births and deaths were recorded in the bible.

Grandparents' Farming

Dunning: Did you know your grandparents?

Vincent: Yes. They were farmers. When I first knew them, they were about one mile out of the town. I used to go out and visit their home there. Later, they were about three miles out of town. At that time they were small farmers. They were growing cotton. They also grew some wheat, corn, and sugar cane. They had very large truck gardens. They raised hogs and beef. They kept it by hanging it in a small shed. There was no way of refrigerating things at that time. That was always a big event at the end of the year, when it was cold enough that you could do the butchering and depend upon the winter weather for preserving the meat.

Dunning: And hope that you don't have a hot spell after that.

Vincent: Yes. I remember that very well.

Dunning: Did you have other brothers and sisters?

Vincent: I have one brother who lives in Richmond. My one sister died quite a few years ago. We were all born in Oklahoma.

One thing I do recall when I went to my grandparents, was helping them chop cotton. I actually was picking cotton. I didn't pick very much. I was pretty small. But I was involved in picking cotton out of the cotton bolls. I did have some experience of what it was like to be a cotton farmer.

Dunning: There's not many people who can say that.

Vincent: No, there's not many.

Description of Mother

Dunning: What was your mother like? Can you describe a typical day for her when the children were living at home?

Vincent: My mother had a lot of energy, a good hard-working woman who was just full of energy. We had a small place right in town and we had a cow, so in the morning it was a matter of getting out and milking the cow. We had a large garden and she would work in that. Then she would go down and work at the store with my dad. She was a very busy woman. She was the oldest of eleven children. So, early in life she was the one that had to start taking care of the younger ones.

Dunning: She was probably like the second mother.

Vincent: Yes, she got an early start in that regard. She had lots of energy. During those days, you did an awful lot of working. You worked six days a week, or seven. Going to church on Sunday was the break that people had, going to Sunday school and to church.

Religious Affiliation: The Baptist Church

Dunning: What church would that be?

Vincent: We were Baptists. In our little town there was a Baptist and a Methodist church. There were not enough people to support two ministers. They had an arrangement on alternate Sundays of going to the Methodist church, and then to the Baptist church. It was a very flexible deal. I'm not sure whether the Methodists or the Baptists seemed to feel keenly about what differences they really had. I don't recall any distinct feelings that developed one way or the other. I do know one thing for sure, that was a time--not just then--when the bad people were the Catholics. The Catholics, they were the bad people.

Dunning: Now why was that?

Vincent: It just seemed to be a fact of life. The Catholics were the bad people. There were no Catholics. There were no Catholic churches. The South in general just didn't have Catholic churches.

Dunning: So you didn't really know any Catholics?

Vincent: No, we didn't have any good reason for disliking them, no good reason at all.

Dunning: Has that feeling changed?

Vincent: No, I would be jumping way ahead, quite a few years. There was quite a strong feeling, though. It was engendered into people. For some of the older people that lived there longer, it was a stronger feeling. Even when we came out here many years later, and we were here in Richmond and I was going to high school, I was going to Baptist church on Sundays and sort of

following out the old pattern. I couldn't understand why there should be any difference in feeling between a person because they were a Catholic or a Protestant. If you liked them and you got along with people, I couldn't stand that idea.

Somehow, I couldn't rationalize why it made sense to not like people because they happened to go to a different church. So I quit going. I felt that strongly about that. To me I felt that was working against what I thought I was learning, going to church and learning about the Ten Commandments, getting along with people and trying to help people if they need help. So I couldn't rationalize that.

That's going way ahead, but that was the final part of that. I have no strong feelings, whether people have a strong religious faith one way or another, I accept that. People have that right. How fortunate it is that some people can feel and get so much support from the system. Some people, I think, need it more than others. I have no belief one way or the other.

Dunning: You found very little confusion going from the Methodist to the Baptist?

Vincent: No, they just had different hymn books.

Cotton, the Cash Crop

Farmers and Banks go Broke

Vincent: What else do I recall from those days? Cotton was big. That was the cash crop. In those days, that was well before we had security for farmers, or anyone. The typical pattern was to borrow money from the bank so

that you could plant your crops as you do now, same pattern. You would hope that you had a good crop, and that you got a good price for it. All the people that were in business just had to keep on writing sales slips that so-and-so owed them so much money for the things they bought.

The whole summer, during the growing season, was one of just paper. Somebody owed somebody something. When the harvest was in, that's when people paid their bills. That was the type of situation that existed. That was working okay during the time when prices were good and things were getting along okay. But then, in 1920 or '21, at that time right after the war, the cotton prices were still going up. They were quite low, actually, by comparison with today. They may have been five cents a pound.

It started going up, six cents, seven cents. If the farmers had sold their cotton, they could have paid all their bills to the bank and the merchants, but they kept holding on and holding on. They kept on being told, "It's going to go up some more, don't sell." So they kept holding their cotton before they sent it to market. Suddenly the market just broke, and it fell down to four or five cents. Well, when they got through actually selling their cotton, there just wasn't enough money to pay up. The farmers went broke, the banks went broke, and the merchants went broke. It just fell apart.

Dunning: It was a pretty shaky economy.

Vincent: Banks went broke everywhere. Those were the good old days that some people refer to, back when people had to make it on their own. I know my dad had our home mortgaged to the bank. He didn't get paid, and we couldn't pay our bills to the bank. And so he came West. That was about 1920.

Father Moves West to Seek Work, ca. 1920

Vincent: He came out alone and went to work for a power company. It was the San Joaquin Light and Power Company, which was eventually purchased by Southern California Edison Company. They were building hydroelectric plants on the San Joaquin River, which starts above Huntington Lake and meanders on down the mountainside towards Fresno. Many power plants were being built. They built one, and they would soon find another spot.

My father was working way in the high mountains, where there was a lot of snow. During the winter time, the only way they got mail was via dogsled that used to go down to a certain place where the railroad stations was located. Those were exciting postcards that Dad sent back showing his life in the snow in the high mountains. We stayed in Oklahoma there until school was out the following year.

Dunning: Let me backtrack a little bit. This was 1920. Do you remember anything about the family decision to move West?

Vincent: My dad realized we had to do something. There was no future where we were in Oklahoma at that time.

Dunning: Were there a lot of people in similar situations?

Vincent: Many people were in the same condition. The banks had gone broke.

Dunning: In your town?

Vincent: In our town, yes. I don't know how many others moved. My dad decided to come West.

Family Reunites in Hairpin, California

Dunning: And he came alone?

Vincent: He came alone and got situated in this high mountain spot. We came out the following summer. About '21. We were located at a place called Hairpin, which is about halfway between Fresno and Huntington Lake. They were building a power station down the grade, way down. The river was down below. At that time, the primary way of getting there was by train. They had just a conventional steam locomotive that went up to a place called Aubery. From Aubery, they used a Shay locomotive, the kind that has the side cranks and gears. That's the kind of train that worked from Aubery all the way up to Huntington Lake, because of the curving tracks. I recall the excitement of the train trip from Aubery to Hairpin.

Living in a Tent

Vincent: We lived in a tent. The tent was located on a wooden platform. The construction camp was nothing, at that time, but just wooden platforms with the tents. My dad had come down from the high mountain area. He was running the commissary and the pool hall. It had a couple of pool tables and snack foods were available in a little store for people who worked in the area.

I recall I used to go down and play pool. I was pretty young. I used to get pretty good at it, because there wasn't much else to do then. So I was getting to be pretty good, although I was a little tyke. When I was beating out some of the older people, some of them

were quite concerned about anyone who would allow their youngster to spend time down at the pool hall. I remember that.

Dunning: I'm curious as to how your father got that particular job? Did he come out with the job, or did he find it after he arrived?

Vincent: I'm trying to recall. One other member of my grandmother's family may have been out here ahead of time, and may have written a letter and suggested he come on out. I keep thinking in the background that he had some encouragement to come out here.

Dunning: This was really the pre-dustbowl era.

Vincent: Oh, yes it's well before the dustbowl. It was at a time when California was starting to grow. Hydro-electric power was the main source of generating electricity at that time. The San Joaquin Valley was recognized as a good place for vineyards and all kinds of fruits. The San Joaquin Valley was getting to be well-established in that regard, and so many little towns were going up. There was a need for electrical energy. This was a natural push for developing the mountain areas for power.

California Dream and the Westward Movement

Dunning: You hear so much about the California dream. Do you think that had an influence on your family's decision to come?

Vincent: I really don't think so. I think back in those times that it was not uncommon, if you felt things weren't going right where you were, you decided you would go out and try it somewhere else. There's a certain

amount of that. They had come out of Tennessee because this was a promise. This was part of the westward movement, and California was out west.

In that regard, it could have been just part of what it was like during those early days of pioneers moving out west. The promised land--there's not necessarily an assured promise that you'll be successful there. But you get the green pastures concept, I think, of "Let's go on out."

Dunning: As a young boy--you were eight or nine at that time--did you have any ideas of what you thought California would be like? Was there any excitement connected with it?

Vincent: Oh, we were very excited about coming out here once my dad had a job and once he had sent us some money so we could buy our ticket to come out on the train. We were very excited about moving out.

Dunning: And your mother also?

Vincent: Oh, yes. We were all quite excited about coming out here, because it was a new land. The idea of the mountains and all that we saw on the postcards and my dad's reporting of it--it suggested an exciting place to go to.

Dunning: Just as an aside, did your family ever save any of those postcards from your father?

Vincent: I think that we have one somewhere. I recall reading one not so long ago. We have a collection of old photographs.

Dunning: That would be an interesting document.



John Vincent (*left* with
banjo) and neighbors,
Oklahoma, early 1900s.



J. A. Vincent and cousin
Jewell, Oklahoma, 1914.



ARRIVAL IN CALIFORNIA, EARLY 1920s

Above: John Vincent's postcard from California to his daughter Carrie Lucille Vincent in Tupelo, Oklahoma, ca. 1920. "Sister, how would you like this kind of life...from Daddy."

Below left: The Vincent family's first house in Hairpin, California, 1921. Wooden platform with tent was a typical construction in this area before the housetrailer.

Below right: Tressie and John Vincent, Aubery, California, 1921. Mother's words on back of photograph: "My hat kindly shades my face but you can tell who it is..."



Left: Tressie Vincent posing by a California gas station and campground, ca. 1921.

Below: Vincent family. From left, Lucille, J. D., J. A., mother Tressie. Note on back: "Probably 1921 or 1922 at Roeding Park, Fresno, Ca. We had moved from Hairpin in the foothills to Fresno in order to go to school. Dad worked in a grocery store for awhile then joined the Santa Fe at Bakersfield--eventually to Richmond December 1923."





Standard Oil work gang, Richmond, late 1920s. Uncle Marvin Vincent is in the group.



J. A. Vincent and the family's new Chevrolet, Ferry Point, Richmond, 1929.



J. A. Vincent on the mast
of the *Pola*, 1941.

*Photographed by
Ernest Corhead*



The *Pola*, a 23' Bear Class
boat built by J. A. Vincent
and launched in 1939.

*Photographed by
Ernest Corhead*



Vincent family portrait, 1963. *From left:* Barbara, J. A., David, Stephen, and Christopher. Son Michael was not present for the photo session.

Parents' Emphasis on Education

Vincent: We didn't stay long at Hairpin because, as I mentioned, my dad was a schoolteacher. Back in Tupelo and in Oklahoma, schools were a very important--churches and schools were as important as anything. A community established both. My parents were strongly dedicated and felt we must go to school.

Unfortunately--perhaps it was fortunate--maybe like my mother's brothers and sisters, many of them didn't get very far in school, because in those days so much of the farming was done by just manual labor, with horses and people. The time required to make your living on the farm was much greater than it was later, where you had tractors to help you. As a result, with these large families, the daughters were oftentimes busy helping the mother keep the household activities going and the sons were in the fields with their fathers. It was not uncommon, and if you got to the sixth grade, that was about it.

Dunning: You were doing well if you got that far.

Vincent: You were doing well if you got to the sixth grade. There was a strong dedication on my parents' part to see that we went to good schools. And so my dad--I'm trying to recall. Perhaps this is the time when the uncle came in that was working for the Santa Fe. He mentioned that my father could get a job on the Santa Fe Railroad. So we moved to Fresno.

Move to Fresno and Better Schools

Dunning: You moved from Hairpin?

Vincent: We moved from Hairpin down to Fresno, which was not horribly far away. It was down into Fresno, because the schools were there. At that time, I was about ten and a half, eleven years old, in that range. The schools were good. My dad actually went to work in Bakersfield. He would come home on the weekends to Fresno, and then go back again during the time we were living there. We were sharing a house with my mother's cousin at that time, when we were in Fresno.

Some of the things I recall about Fresno in those days--it was awfully hot. That was before air conditioning. They didn't have air conditioning there. Mighty hot. Lots of vineyards and fruits. It was just beautiful to see so much fruit and all, because we had gotten accustomed to enjoying fruit back in our home country, in Oklahoma. You canned everything that you could possibly can, vegetables and fruits, and then with the meats that you had in the winter time, that's the way you went through the winter, with the canned foods.

Dunning: You were accustomed to a very wholesome diet.

Vincent: We were accustomed to enjoying nice food. In California, we got introduced to all this fruit, lovely fruits, like grapefruit, which we had never seen before.

Dunning: Was your father teaching in Bakersfield?

Vincent: No, he was working. I don't recall exactly what work he was doing, but it was manual labor at that time.

Dunning: That was basically the end of his teaching career?

Vincent: He had actually stopped teaching when he went into business. There was always a strong dedication in my family to see that we had the best schooling we could get. That was one of the reasons we wanted to go to Fresno, so that we could have good schools.

Recollections of Fresno, Early 1920s

Picking Fruit in the Vineyards

I have some interesting recollections about Fresno. I remember working in the vineyards. The grapes were collected and placed on a tray about so wide, about thirty inches by about two feet. Maybe it was more like three feet by two feet. The trays were left in the field and the grapes became sun dried raisins. They were sold as Sunkist raisins--maybe it was Sunmaid--same as today. I used to get a nickel a tray for picking grapes then. I didn't make very much money at that.

When picking apricots, you had a great big lug box, and I think you got ten cents for that. It took a long time to fill one of the boxes with apricots. It was the thing to do, though. Youngsters and families helped the farmers pick their fruit, and the men and women worked in the packing and drying sheds. That was quite a common practice.

Dunning: Was that your first real job outside the family?

Vincent: Outside the family, yes. That was only just a spot deal for a while. I made a few extra nickels and dimes. I also peddled the Saturday Evening Post door-to-door. There wasn't much money around in those days. This was in the agricultural area. Fresno wasn't very much of a place.

Farmers' Market

Vincent: One of the things that I recall that always impressed me was the farmers' market. The courthouse was right in the center of town within a nice park. Two sides of the park were jammed with fruit stands and vegetable stands twice a week, I guess Wednesday and Saturday. People just poured into these farmers' markets.

Dunning: Would people come from the surrounding towns?

Vincent: Not the surrounding town as much as people in the town. In the surrounding towns they had their own markets. You didn't travel very far those days. You generally stayed right in town, except on special occasions, maybe a swimming and picnic trip to a river somewhere. That was a special deal, you went out traveling to find a good place to swim.

Contact with Armenians

I had my first contact with Armenians in Fresno. They were very hard-working, industrious people. About two blocks from us there was an Armenian family and they had vegetables growing in their front yard, side yard, and I think somebody's vacant lot. They just produced a heck of a lot of vegetables, which they sold from a cart as it was moved throughout the neighborhood. It was a good example of how hard-working some of these immigrants are. They don't waste anything.

I also learned more about the Armenians when trying to sell newspapers downtown, right on the busy main corners. Some corners are always better than other corners. I found soon that the best corner was not easy to keep because the Armenians would team up on

you and you would find yourself over on the least desirable corner. So I grew up with a feeling of being somewhat antagonistic toward Armenians.

Dunning: Was that one of your first experiences with a different ethnic group?

Vincent: Yes, it was. It was my first experience with that. We came to California, and here we found the Armenians. They had also found California.

Dunning: How many years did your family stay in Fresno?

Vincent: Not long. My dad worked in Bakersfield for a while. He didn't go to work for the Santa Fe right off. When we went to Fresno, he was working in a small grocery store. They called it a Piggly Wiggly store. I think it eventually came to be known as the Safeway store.

Schooling in Fresno:--Music Appreciation##

Vincent: The experience we had in school in Fresno was a good one. I went to grammar school there. One of the things I remember about the grammar school was a period each week, in fact more than just one day a week, where appreciation of music was a part of our schedule. I recall the teacher with the little old hand cranked wind-up Victrola--the home of the only turntable and speaker combination in those days--and her collection of classical records.

They had a contest going in Fresno, where people from all the schools went in to compete on an annual basis for determining what particular piece was being played when you only heard a few seconds of the music. The teacher used to play classical records so we could get well acquainted with them. Then the teacher would

start playing short periods of it. Each class would have a candidate that was the best one in the class, and then eventually the best in the school. Then they met at some central place in Fresno. It was quite an honor to be a participant. From the students' standpoint it was fun and it is doubtful that much thought was given as to how it might affect the community in the future.

The above program was established in the early twenties, and I'll just take off from there and forget about the rest of Fresno for the moment. From an experience many years later it does suggest something about the long term effect upon the community. I don't know if you ever heard of the Standard Symphony Hour that used to play on radio. It was the Standard Symphony Hour and it was sponsored by the Standard Oil Company of California. They hired the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra to play on a Sunday evening for one hour for a radio program. It was from eight o'clock to nine o'clock on Sunday night. It was a fixture very much like the Texaco Opera out of New York, on a Saturday afternoon, which had been going for forty-seven years, so I heard the other day.

This symphony program took place in the Opera House and was open to the public. A ticket was required in order to go there. I found out many years later how difficult it was to obtain tickets even though I was an employee with Chevron. It was recognized as being a really choice opportunity to actually observe a live symphony. The symphony for many years traveled around the state and eventually did all of their playing in San Francisco.

Many years later, I recall, they were in Fresno for their Sunday night Standard Hour broadcast. They said the demand for tickets was so high that they

actually had to use two auditoriums. People were even standing on the outside. This is at least thirty to forty years after I had lived in Fresno.

I have a feeling this example is a way of proving that the indoctrination one gets early in life through the schools can actually influence the long term interests of the community. From the standpoint of the size of the city and all, Fresno had an unusually high demand for tickets. That's a good example of how being indoctrinated early can just become a part of a way of life for enjoying things like that.

Dunning: And music was a really positive area to be indoctrinated in.

Vincent: Yes, it was. I think having that opportunity was good. Anytime if you get a chance to learn about some of the things that are good things, I think it becomes a part of you.

Family Relocates in Richmond, 1923

Father Works for the Santa Fe Railroad

Vincent: Getting back to Fresno, we didn't stay there long. I mentioned my dad worked in the grocery store. Then he got this job in Bakersfield, and he would commute home on weekends. Then the Santa Fe had an opening in Richmond. He came up and took that job. I think he may have been here a few weeks or months before we came up here. We came at Christmas time, actually in 1923. That was our move, and we moved into Ferry Point, the western terminus of the Santa Fe.

Memories of Train Ride from Oklahoma to California

One thing I did forget to tell you about is that when we came to California from Oklahoma--we came out on the train, of course--we had picnic baskets and a suitcase. There was an enormous amount of picnic food, fried chicken and canned things, cakes and all. We had shoe boxes with things. We had quite a collection of food as we came on out west, and we had one dollar. One dollar, to spend at the Fred Harvey Dining Rooms when the train stopped at intervals to feed the passengers. The only thing that we bought was some milk, which was quite inexpensive. So we would buy milk.

Dunning: You had one dollar each?

Vincent: Total, for the whole family. All four of us came out. We had one dollar, and we spent one dollar, all the way from Oklahoma to Fresno, California.

Dunning: That was all you spent, or that's all you had?

Vincent: That was all we had.

Dunning: After the train ticket--?

Vincent: After the train ticket we could only afford to spend a dollar. That was to give you an idea of how poor, and how little there was in the way of currency available. When you got wiped out, you signed everything away to the bank, and that was it.

Dunning: Did your family sell everything?

Vincent: We had our home mortgaged, and that was what it amounted to. That was our main asset. We didn't own a car or anything. We had a trunk or two that we put our belongings in, and that was it. We brought out some

books. We had The Book of Knowledge, and I remember poring through that as a youngster. It was exciting to read about other places. There was nothing too exciting about Oklahoma. It was kind of a flat land. You tried to read about some other place. You could dream about other places by reading about them. There was no library, of course, in the small town. Books of that sort were just wonderful. That was your break away from your hot, everyday, humdrum sort of life.

Attitudes Towards Oklahoma Migrants

Dunning: Because your family came pre-dustbowl, were you caught up in the whole stereotype of Okies?

Vincent: No, not at that time. No, the negative deal didn't develop until after the Steinbeck era came in.

Dunning: When you arrived from Oklahoma, did Californians know about Oklahoma?

Vincent: I think at that time, other people were moving into California. The climate was right for people to just sort of be absorbed.

Dunning: Not in such great droves?

Vincent: No, they were just coming in bit by bit. Not like the dustbowl era, which really started people moving. That really hit a larger area of the country. That set the stage for the derogatory comments about the Okies and such.

I recall that later on during the wartime here they had a great influx of people brought out to work in the shipyards. Kaiser got money for bringing people in. He needed people and brought them in by the

busloads from the Midwest and the South. The great push of people into the West brought forth again the old term Okie. I know my son, particularly my oldest son, was quite sensitive to it. It was horrible to think his dad was an Okie. That just gives you an idea of the feeling. It was not so many years ago that it was a sensitive subject to youngsters.

Dunning: Did you have a certain stereotype of Okies or Arkies?

Vincent: No. There's quite a variety of people as far as the make-up was concerned. You couldn't really say that there was any stereotype for an Okie as a particular class of people. There were those that were professionals, those that were recognized in their fields, and those who had fallen upon bad times.

Dunning: Did you feel an identification with those people that came out later?

Vincent: Yes, because I had some of the same feelings. I realized what was going on with them because we had experienced that business of just being wiped out, with nothing, just nothing. There was nothing in those days. There were no safety nets of any kind. There was nothing. People started moving out, looking for a better opportunity to make a go of it. I felt that you should give them credit for deciding to try to do something about their situation, that they had the courage to get up and leave.

Most people don't realize how difficult it is to just leave your whole family, your grandparents, your brothers, your sisters. My mother, of course, experienced it more than we did because we were younger. But your friends know it's not easy just to literally up and leave everything. You're a stranger. Your whole base, everything you've grown up with. It's

not the easiest thing to do. So I had an empathy for their concerns. It didn't seem right that they should be so badly criticized.

There were certainly some unusual looking contraptions that people got here in, and the clothes they wore, the trailers and old trucks and beat up cars. I recall that period quite well because it brought back to me the feelings that we had, some of the early feelings that we had of being transplanted from one place to another.

Dorothea Lange Exhibit, New York, 1960s

You may recall that--I'm getting away from the story, only I think I should mention it. When Roosevelt came in and things were in such a mess and a lot of different programs were started, he had many quotations about what we had to do in order to get ourselves going again. Many interesting quotes, history shows it. They decided to have pictures taken of the conditions as they were. [Edward] Weston was one of them. Dorothea Lange was one of them. They hired people that were good photographers to take a picture of what it was, this movement of people.

I was in New York City on one of my business trips, not so many years ago. I recall going to an exhibit of photographs in the Museum of Modern Art. They had a full floor of them. They not only had the pictures, but they had these captions of what Roosevelt said at that time. It was an historical piece. It was beautifully laid out, very well organized, and people were just pouring past these pictures.

It wasn't uncommon to see older people with tears running down their faces, the feelings it brought back to them. For many young people, when they looked at these pictures, they started laughing. They thought it was a joke, in a way. They had no feelings at all of what they were looking at, to see people moving under those conditions. They had absolutely no feelings at all. It was a surprise to think that people can be reacting that way, but they had no sense of history. They had never heard of it. I recall that.

Dunning: What year was this?

Vincent: I would say this was less than twenty years ago. That would be back in '65. That would be about thirty years after the Great Depression.

Dunning: I think it only shows that some of our history books and courses didn't really get through at all. Or that the story wasn't told.

Vincent: I think it wasn't brought along, as it is difficult to explain how a country with so many resources could find itself in such desperate straits. I heard the parallel the other day when people were asked about the Vietnam War, and asked about the Kennedys. People in their twenties were not born when the Kennedys were in power, and then Vietnam after that. In twenty years time, if people don't talk about something, you have no feeling for it. Today there are so few people who even know about the Vietnam War, right now. They either don't want to talk about it or they don't recall anything.

Dunning: When there are so many lessons to be learned.

Vincent: Yes. There are things that should be picked up and passed on. These are examples of depending on how history is taught, people lose, or perhaps don't gain, what you might think they might have gained from history, or the mistakes you made, picking them up and

carrying them on. They always want to forget those mistakes, and then they can go out and invent their own mistakes, it seems.

Now, I've jumped way ahead from where I left off. That's just some of the reactions and things of getting to Ferry Point itself.

Visits to Tupelo, Oklahoma

Dunning: I did want to ask you about coming from Oklahoma because of those stereotypes.

Vincent: I went back a few times. While my dad was working at Santa Fe he had passes. I remember going back and visiting my relatives and some friends of my mother in Tupelo. I had a cousin there. I had been in California for a few years. My voice had changed because I was growing older. My cousin felt that I was talking so different than I had talked when I was there. I remember he wanted to get a soap box, and he was going to charge to hear me talk. That was interesting.

Dunning: You do seem to have an unusual accent. I'm wondering if you had to unlearn your Oklahoma accent?

Vincent: No, you see, my mother, the Scottish and Welsh--you think of Welsh as being a little slurred speaking. The Scottish, on the other hand, have a higher tempo. My mother's speaking is a little higher tempo. In her family she has a sister, my aunt, that had a distinctly different tone to the voice than many of those that one encountered. Over a period of time, some people think I have a British accent. So I'm not sure what I have.

Dunning: No one would guess you were from Tupelo.

Vincent: No. I just say well, heck. I just tell them that we were here first.

Dunning: How was it to go back to Tupelo?

Vincent: It was, of course, nice to visit the families again. It seemed not nearly as exciting as being out here. California's got so much going for it. I always was pleased to get back here, because I wanted to go back here, I enjoyed going down to the Bay. I loved being around the water.

Reminiscences of Grandparents

Dunning: How about your mother? Did she go back to visit?

Vincent: She went back several times. My dad went back a few times. She kept going back there over the years, quite a few times. She tried to maintain contacts with her mother. My grandmother was just a teeny little gal, so big. My grandfather was of a little larger stature. I always remember one thing about my grandmother, she used to take a little twig and kind of mess up the end of it to make a little brush out of it. She would use baking soda and polish her teeth with that. She never lost a single tooth in all of her life, that is after her baby teeth. Beautiful white teeth. I always remembered that.

She used to sit out on those little chairs--simple frame-like chairs with the rawhide criss-cross. That was quite common. I remember she would be sitting under a shade tree. After eating she would be out there doing her teeth. She was so proud of her teeth. She never had a cavity.

My grandfather had a beautiful white beard. It was not a long one. He had a beautiful head of hair. I mention this because you remember back in the beatnik time when people were letting their beards grow here. Some of my nephews were doing their thing, trying to get beards. My mother used to get upset with them because they were letting their beards grow like that. She was scoffing at those beatniks with their beards.

I said, "Mother, as I recall, didn't your dad have a lovely beard? I recall, I've seen pictures of Jesus, he had a long beard, and the disciples with their lovely beards. Why do you dislike beatniks?" It wasn't fair, really. This is not so many years ago. It was during the beatnik period. I had a typical engineering approach. Logical as hell.

Dunning: It doesn't work with your mother, though.

Vincent: Things are supposed to be right or wrong, so I thought. There are things you shouldn't do. She never really appreciated my relating her dad to a beatnik.

Dunning: I was going to ask you, oftentimes, one member of a family would come out West and then they would be followed by ten or twenty others. Did that happen in your family?

Vincent: Not really. We came, and then my mother had one brother who was just about a couple of years older than I was. He was deaf. He came out here, and he brought along a deaf friend. They lived with us for a while at Ferry Point. So that was the beginning of some of the movement. One of her sisters was married to a fellow in Oklahoma, and they came out and established themselves in the San Joaquin Valley. There was one there. Then I have two different cousins that moved to California. One in Marysville and another one in the San Joaquin Valley. So some of the family in that regard moved, but not a large number. One of my uncles

used to come out and work during the harvest season out here in cotton, running a cotton gin down in the Fresno-Merced area.

Dunning: Would he come out seasonally?

Vincent: He would come out like seasonal labor. It wasn't uncommon. He continued to do what he had done when he was quite young. In the Midwest it took a lot of labor in order to do the harvesting of the wheat. These mechanical harvesters were quite expensive and big, and they required a large crew to do the cutting of the wheat, shocking it, tossing it up into a wagon, and then taking the wagon over and piling it up in a great big pile. Then they pulled the harvester alongside, and then they had to start throwing the wheat off of that pile into the harvester. These were all different steps. The harvesters all took a lot of manpower.

It was not uncommon for people, when harvesting season was in, to go there on a freight train. The railroads didn't care. People just got on, and they sat on top of the freight cars and headed off north to Kansas or Nebraska. And they worked the crops, the wheat as the harvesting was taking place. They would return home and then they got involved--cotton picking would come later in the season in relation to the wheat season. That's the way they went out to make some extra money. When my uncle was coming out here and working, when the cotton was in, that was following the same pattern. So you could make some extra bucks that you couldn't make where you were.

Santa Fe Terminus at Ferry Point

Dunning: Going back to your arrival at Ferry Point, what are some of your first memories of that?

Vincent: That was exciting because that was the first time I had ever seen such a large bay.

Dunning: You said you love water.

Vincent: I love water. We lived at this terminal and right adjacent to the railroad tracks. These railroad tracks were used for moving freight cars onto the barges, which were pulled by tugs to San Francisco. That was the terminal of the Santa Fe. That's the way they moved the box cars to San Francisco, by freight barges. Then there was a ferry boat, a beautiful ferry boat. There were two of them, but only one was in operation at the time. A beautiful one that was bringing passengers in and out of the place.

Dunning: Do you remember its name?

Vincent: Yes, the San Pedro. I have a book about ferry boats that was loaned to me by Tom Edwards. I'm not so sure where he got it. It has the story of the San Pedro and the San Pablo and other ferry boats. We came into Ferry Point, where all of these trains were going and coming. Those were steam trains in those days. They made a lot of noise. They were huffing and puffing away. They sound much different than a diesel engine, for sure. It was an exciting deal to be associated with so much activity like that.

Dunning: Also, Ferry Point was the terminus for the transcontinental line.

Vincent: Yes, it was. There were people coming to San Francisco. These were the immigrants coming through, many of them from somewhere east, coming into San Francisco. Many people were coming into San Francisco from the valley towns because--I mentioned there was no air conditioning. It gets hot. It gets extremely hot in the San Joaquin Valley. And they would get on the

train and come in like on a Friday afternoon, or in the evening, headed for San Francisco to spend the weekend. Then on Sunday they were going home again.

We used to recall how crazy these people were. They were so accustomed to wearing nothing more than a straw hat and a shirt. That was the extent of their foul-weather gear coming into San Francisco with fog and everything. We used to say, "These people are going to be in for an experience."

Ferry Point was home base for thirteen years.

Living in a Boxcar

Dunning: Where, exactly, was your house?

Vincent: I'll tell you exactly where it was. It was located near a yellow, almost a two-story building, still standing at Ferry Point. You have to go way on out to the end of Garrard Boulevard. Then when you look across to the right, that's Ferry Point.

Dunning: I've been out there.

Vincent: You can go out the railroad tracks, or you can go out Garrard Boulevard and then go about a thousand feet to the west to the terminal. Well, that yellow building is the pumphouse where my dad was working. He was the stationery engineer that used to run this pumphouse. That pumphouse used to supply the energy to pump fuel from the storage shoreside into the barges and the ferries that were running at that time. They also had an air compressor so that they were providing air for the workmen working on the docks where they needed to run their tools. Pneumatic tools were commonly used at that time.

My home was just this side of that yellow building, the pumphouse. It was a very simple structure. It was a boxcar. They had built rooms on one side. In this boxcar, on one end was our kitchen, next a dining room, and a bedroom. Two more bedrooms were built into the side rooms. We had very simple accommodations. The boxcar wasn't up on wheels.

It was actually down on the ground, and my front yard was a dock. It just stopped right there. I could walk out on it. The bay was right there.

Dunning: Right at your feet.

Vincent: I still remember the excitement of going out and looking out and to see all this activity when we were first there. It was just so exciting and so different. It was really great.

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Dunning: You were talking about your family home being a converted railcar. Was that typical? Were there other families of employees living there?

Vincent: There was one other family that had a nicer place.

Dunning: A nicer boxcar.

Vincent: Actually they had a fabricated structure, not a boxcar. Then there was another just on the other side of their house, another boxcar, a larger one than the one that we were living in. Our transition was from the small one that we lived in there, over to the larger, better boxcar. From there, we eventually landed in the house that was built more like a house. So we lived in three different structures there, three different homes over a period of thirteen years.

The nice thing about the third place was that it did have a little place for gardening. My mother always loved to garden. That was the choice place that we lived in for some time.

Dunning: Was it actually separated from the area where people would disembark?

Vincent: Yes, we were actually right on the edge of the bay, across the tracks from the passenger station. The people that came into the terminal on the passenger trains came into a passenger train shed that was approximately two blocks long, a hundred and fifty feet wide and quite high. There were windows up and down each side of it. That provided the light. It was open on the ends. The trains moved in. There was a waiting room, a large one, adjacent to that. Then there was a covered area over the slip, which provided access to the ferry.

When these passenger trains came in, or when the ferry boat came in, in addition to people walking back and forth to make the transit, there were four-wheeled, heavy duty wagons with sides on them that were used for taking the merchandise, such as newspapers and other things which were being handled by express, and the mail bags. Then there were some flatbed trucks that were used for hauling the baggage from the trains.

All that had to be transferred into these respective four-wheel trucks, and then those are all hooked together. There were special hooks which made it easy to hook them together. So there's like a wagon train. They were towed by a small tractor on and off the ferry. I used to work there helping load and unload the trucks, starting in high school, and on through college on weekends.

Dunning: Was the terminal very busy all day?

Vincent: It was primarily busy in the morning, and then again toward the evening. So it wasn't an all-day activity. There were just a few trains.

Dunning: There were quiet times?

Vincent: Oh, yes. There was a long quiet period during the day.

The Silk Train

Vincent: I do recall exciting events when occasionally there would be a silk train. That consisted of a number of baggage cars loaded with nothing but silk and a fast steam locomotive. A baggage car is nothing more than just the shell of a regular train with very few or no windows at all. It's used for hauling baggage, small parcels, some freight, and mail. They are used occasionally in freight service.

A silk train was made up in San Francisco with silk from China. It was transferred directly from the ship into cars in San Francisco, and then moved by a high-speed train all the way across the country.

Well, moving a special cargo on a high-speed train and the presence of many guards stationed at Ferry Point made it exciting. It was a well-guarded train. You would have thought they were moving gold. The cargo was insured for a million dollars. A million dollars in those days was a big number. The silk had to be well protected. They had to keep it moving in order to save on insurance. Everything was a high-speed operation. It was a high-key team effort, and and they were on their way. I always remember that silk from China.

Dunning: How often was that?

Vincent: Maybe it was a yearly occasion at least. I don't know whether it was any more frequent than once a year. But that was a big day when they went through.

Dunning: Any other stories that really stay in your mind like that?

Vincent: One thing I recall about living at Ferry Point that I always remember was that all of our houses had wood burning stoves. We didn't have any fancy electrical appliances, so the cooking was done on a wood stove. That was always the warm spot in the house. You tended to stay there after dinner.

Hobbies of Youth

Building a Radio

During that time--this was in the early days of radio--I remember building several radios. In those days you built what they called a crystal set. It was a very inexpensive deal that was made by using an oatmeal box, and wrapping it with a lot of fine wire, and then at certain distances, so many winds, you would take a turnoff, and put a twist in the wire and keep going, and a few more winds and then another twist. Then you would have a long area of no takeoffs or twists at all. Then there was a section where you had maybe just one or two turns and a twist. That was the vernier section of the tuning process.

These loops then were attached to short connecting wires that were connected to a selector switch. The switch was made by drilling holes on a fixed radius in a piece of plywood. Small flat-headed nickel plated

bolts were inserted into the holes and became contacts. The short wires from the coil were soldered to the ends of these bolts. The switch arm and knob could be moved from contact to contact. There were two sets of selector switches, one for rough tuning and one for fine tuning.

One selector switch took a section of many turns and the other hooked into a section of only a few turns. By that means you could refine the length of coil that you had there. That was the way you selected the particular frequency and station that you were going to be listening to.

The additional equipment consisted of a set of headphones, an outdoor antenna, and a little crystal which was about like a button as big around and about that thick.

Dunning: About a half-inch?

Vincent: About a half-inch in diameter and about a quarter-inch deep. It was just a small little deal. You had to have a cup to mount it in with a screw to help hold it in place. Then there was what they call a "cat's whisker" that was mounted on a moveable arm. The "cat's whisker" was a coil-like pointed wire which was moved from place to place on the crystal in order to find a choice spot. With the crystal you were able to convert the high frequency radio signal to audio frequency so that it could be listened to with a headset.

If you put the right combination together, you could get good reception. But it was primarily local reception. I recall the excitement once, though, of getting a distant station during a so-called "DX hour." They used to have a half-hour between seven-thirty and eight o'clock in the evening when all the local stations shut down.

Then all the people with their new little devices, their new radio sets, whether they were crystal sets, or some of the first ones with single tube, two-tube, or three-tube radios. They provided a quiet period so you didn't have interference locally, so you could see how far you could get. I still remember the excitement one evening of picking up a station in Los Angeles. It came through very clear on my little constructed home-made deal. That was one of the exciting things that I always remember.

Dunning: Now what is DX?

Vincent: DX was a quiet period. All the local stations are off the air as an assist to all the amateurs--and everyone was an amateur. At that time, I don't think there were many commercial sets. This was in the twenties, when radio was just starting to come out.

Visiting the Point Richmond Library

Vincent: I recall that I used to go to the library at Point Richmond. They had a lovely little library. It's still there now.

Dunning: Is it in the same location on Washington Street?

Vincent: Same location. That was an exciting place to go to. I used to go there. I would pore through everything about radio. I remember they had the most lovely librarian, an older woman, thin, a smart little woman.

Dunning: Do you remember her name?

Vincent: I wish I could remember her name. She was so short. She used to sit up on a chair in an elevated section. Her desk was up high, so that she could kind of over-view the operation there. That was her bailiwick, that library. She wasn't trying to dominate you as much as I think she was just keeping an eye on things. She was such a nice woman.

I used to indicate my frustrations that I had run out of books. I would take an armload of books down home and read. I loved to walk home with books and pore through them. I remember my frustration when I ran out of books on radio. She said, "You just tell me what you want. I'll go over to the main library." It was on Fourth Street, just one block off of Macdonald; it's now the Richmond Museum.

Dunning: At Fourth and Nevin?

Vincent: Yes. That used to be the main library. She said, "I go over on Wednesday." And she used to ride the trolley car from Point Richmond over there. She said, "I'll bring you back whatever you want." I just always thought that was so nice. And she did. I always had the nicest feeling toward librarians ever since then, because they were so nice. That was the way I kept on whetting my appetite for--I would read everything that was in an area that I was interested in. Then eventually, I was able to start going there myself.

That was one of my early recollections associated with the beginning days of radio. I recall when I made my first set using one of these round oatmeal boxes. Someone knew I was interested in radio. It was an electrician who said, "Oh, I've got an old transformer up there in Richmond. I'll bring it to you." He brought me this old transformer. I was able to unwind

that fine wire. It was just the right size. I remember that was my available supply of wire for making my radio sets. I made a number of crystal sets. That was fun during those early days, and sort of pioneering days in radio.

Dunning: As it evolved you became an engineer?

Vincent: Yes, I did.

Dunning: When you were young, did you have a certain idea of what your life was going to be like, or certain ambitions about what you wanted to be?

Vincent: I had no strong feelings about what I wanted to do, except I was always involved in building something, fabricating something, and getting involved that way. That led me into following up in my schooling in the engineering field.

Dunning: What was the school that you went to when you moved to Ferry Point?

Vincent: I went to Washington School. I went there for six months, and then I finished my grammar school. At that time, I joined the Boy Scouts. I was twelve years old, and I could join the Boy Scouts. They used to meet in the first school that was built in Richmond. That was a little old school over toward Standard Oil, right by Chevron Research, this side, across the street and down there at Castro and Standard Avenue, right on that corner. The area is now a park, Kinney Park. That's where they had the first school. We used to meet there in this little schoolhouse. We used to go there for our meetings once a week.

Recollections of Point Richmond

Dunning: Could you talk a little about what Point Richmond was like at that time?

Vincent: Yes, I have fond recollections of Point Richmond at that time. The area where the firehouse is now located used to be a depressed area, several feet below the street level. At one end of this section between the two streets, there was a bandstand. That was a place for open air concerts. I don't recall going to any of the open air concerts. Adjacent to that there was a furniture store. Adjacent to that was the library. At least that's my recollection of that little diamond section right at the midpoint of town.

Santa Fe Market

The Santa Fe Market was there then, way back in the twenties. The thing I recall most about the Santa Fe Market, it used to be a place I went to get scrap meat used for baiting my crab traps. When the crabbing season was on, we used to get a lot of crabs right off the big long dock. I had many crab nets. That used to be my source of bait. That's my recollection of the Santa Fe Market.

Dunning: You probably have fond memories of the Santa Fe yards, too.

Vincent: Yes, because I was able to sell a dozen crabs for a great big silver dollar to the fellow who had the section hands that he housed and fed there at the Richmond Santa Fe yards, where he had several box cars.

And these people were living there. I used to be able to sell them for a dollar. That was really living to think of a whole big silver dollar in my pocket.

Dunning: That's quite an incentive.

Vincent: Oh, it was. We had so much crabmeat, we had crab salads and just crab in cream sauce over hot biscuits. It was always fresh and we cooked it in salt water from the bay and steam from the pumphouse. That was an inexpensive meal, but it was appropriate. To this day when I see Crab Louis for ten dollars and \$10.95 I sort of shudder.

That's a connection of the Santa Fe and Ferry Point. The other place I recall that sticks out in my mind was a lovely bakery that was right across from the tip of the street where the library was located.

Dunning: On Washington Street?

Vincent: No, this was on Park Place. It was a lovely little bakery. We could get large snails, or bear claws, or whatever you want to call them, for a nickel. My dad used to love those. I remember I would go home sometimes from the library with books in one arm and a bag full of bear claws, loaded down on my walk down to Ferry Point. Walking was the common way of going that mile; so I got used to just walking it.

Keller's Beach

Dunning: Would you walk through the tunnel or through the railroad tracks?

Vincent: I went through the railroad tracks a few times, but it was a little bit scary. There was a story that somebody had gotten run over there once, too. As a matter of fact, I think it was at Keller's Beach there. Dan Keller's dad was killed when going through the tunnel.

Dunning: Now, who was this?

Vincent: Keller's Beach was named after the Kellers. They lived right above the beach, and almost over the railroad tunnel. There's a big house that's been built up there now. The old man Keller apparently was drunk when he was run over in that tunnel. So somehow the story of getting run over in the tunnel dimmed our enthusiasm for going through the railroad tunnel.

Richmond Natatorium

Vincent: The other thing I recall about the early days of Point Richmond is that we used to walk past where the natatorium is located now. At that time--prior to 1926--a boarded up or partially broken down fence surrounded the lot. The tennis courts, I think, were there. They may not have even been there. They may have been built at the same time the natatorium was built. The natatorium was built in 1926.

I've always had a fond attachment to that natatorium because I used to go swimming there when we were in Roosevelt Junior High School. Wednesday night, I think, was junior high school night. Thursday, right after school was the high school night. My school was located at Eighth and Bissell. We used to run to Macdonald Avenue and get on the trolley car as soon as the class was over to go out to Point Richmond and our free swim. Free swimming on a Wednesday and Thursday

night, right after school, was something you looked forward to doing. I enjoyed it. It was a lovely place to go, swimming in a nice pool. It's still nice.

I got involved a few years back in the rebuilding of it. I was recalling the feeling of the pleasures that were associated with my early years of using the pool. After several decades of not using the pool I was eager to again use the pool. The story of the rebuilding of it is quite a story in itself, which I won't mention at this point. Sometime when you're going through the hallway to the pool, if you slow down long enough, you should look at that big display board--

Dunning: With the history written on it.

Vincent: The history of the rebuilding of it. I was the co-chairman of the citizens group which made it happen.

Dunning: There are very few pools that you go into where you find its history right on the wall.

Vincent: It's right there. That was an accomplishment, getting a lot of people organized and dedicated to see that something was done. We wanted it done our way, not like somebody else wanted it done. The City wanted to tear it down and build a new one at Eighth and Macdonald. That's a story in itself. That's something that's there now and I saw the beginning of.

Spear Fishing

Dunning: You had mentioned going crabbing. I'm just curious as to what other kinds of fishing you did.

Vincent: We used to use spears. Legally you're not supposed to, I guess. We had a spear about ten to twelve feet long. The head of the spear consisted of several barbs about six inches long which were welded to a crossbar about eight inches wide.

Dunning: What was it made out of?

Vincent: The head was made of iron. The pole was made of wood. If you go to the dock and then go below and get on this reinforcing that held all this piling together, you are only a relatively short distance from the water. When the sun was shining right, you could see the fish come up. After a while, you learned you don't aim at where you think a fish is. You had to learn--

Dunning: --where it's going to be.

Vincent: Due to refraction, the light beams bend when going between the water and the air. Guessing where the fish was used to be fun. That was kind of a fun way of fishing. We used to fish right off the beach there by just casting a line.

Dunning: By Keller's Beach?

Vincent: No, this was right up at Ferry Point. I used to go fishing there. There was a lot of fishing by many visitors.

Dunning: There was actually a beach there?

Vincent: Actually, I fished right off the beach there. We used to get rock cod. Rock cod were excellent, and they're not easy to catch. People used to come from Santa Fe's main repair shops at Richmond and do their fishing there. I got acquainted with some of the people that were running the maintenance shops there.

I have a little story about the side effects of having gotten acquainted with some of those people at that time. This was many years later when I was working at Standard Oil. I was in research. During some of my early days there, they were trying to develop a special grease so that they would be able to keep steam locomotives going longer without having to stop and relubricate the bearings on the driving rods.

There was a British fellow, an Englishman, who was in charge of the grease development work. I was in the engineering side doing test work. I recall that we had the responsibility of doing field testing. This fellow, though, had made the initial contact with some of the people at the repair shops at Richmond. I was assigned to go with him to inspect a locomotive and to see how things were working out. He was so concerned about somebody else coming along. He said that this was a rather sensitive deal. He wanted to let me know there were personalities involved. He wanted to be sure that I didn't screw up and say the wrong thing.

I recall that when we got there, the fellow that he was concerned about greeted me, and he and I spent time talking about the good old days when we went fishing at Ferry Point. I still remember the reaction of the chemist who was responsible in that development work. Suddenly his whole composure changed quite fast when he realized that I was amongst friends. He didn't know before. I hadn't told him that I knew anybody there or anything. I always remember that as an example of the value of having some fishing buddies.

Dunning: How about fishing boats? Would they leave from that area?

Vincent: There were no commercial fishing boats at Ferry Point.

Dunning: Was it mostly over at the Point San Pablo area?

Vincent: I'm trying to recall. The main type of commercial fishing I remember was shrimping off San Quentin. I'm not sure where those boats were kept, perhaps some were operating out of China Camp in Marin County. A few shrimp boats were moored at Point Richmond near the Duncan and Harrelson Company and Deckers Harbor. It was where a boat repair yard is now in operation on Cutting Boulevard.

Dunning: Cal Coast Marine?

Vincent: Yes. On the channel there was a little dock long enough for a couple of boats that were operated by the Chinese. They cooked and dried their shrimp on shore. We would buy a bag of shrimp that would keep you busy eating all afternoon. They were relatively small, and you got a bunch of them for a dime.

Dunning: What about the sardines?

Vincent: I did not know about sardines until many years later. We had herring runs. I remember we used to catch them off the dock with a drop net. My mother would fry or try different ways to prepare them. It didn't take long before we were tired of fish.

This reminds me of an experience I had when we were at Ferry Point. It seemed too bad not to be able to save some by pickling them or something. We'd heard about pickling. There was a fellow there from Norway. He explained how you pickled fish. He explained to me about putting enough salt in the water until a potato would float, presumably a practical way of knowing whether you had a strong enough brine. We had some large old earthen pots. I recall preparing the brine and packing two pots with herring, and closing them with lids.

They were put away in a little shed behind our house and forgotten. We had chickens and at one time we had rabbits. I remember my mother started complaining about a bad odor when she collected the eggs. I checked up on it, and I never smelled anything so bad in my life as when I took the lid off the pots. We didn't have the right formula. I still remember having to dispose of those crocks full of herring which were just downright rotten. I don't recall just how I took care of it, but it was quite an experience at that time.

En Route to Ferry Point

Cozy Cove and Keller's Beach

[Interview 2: April 11, 1985]##

[onsite interview at Ferry Point, Richmond, California, outdoor ambience, water, driving in car]

Dunning: Was this whole area Keller's Beach?

Vincent: This beach area was called Cozy Cove, actually. Keller's Beach is up at the other end. At one time they had a dance pavilion down in here. It was a privately owned amusement park and was one of the places where people went to enjoy the beach in Richmond. It was a popular area for picnicking.

As you go around this point you get into Keller's Beach. At the time that I was most directly associated with it, this was all a barren area with just one little house back here, just right up there. All of this was all barren. This is all new here.



You can see how the beach--it's fairly shallow there, and it is shallow all the way on out. At one time Dan Keller had a boathouse right down on the beach down there. The boathouse had behind it a meandering dock that kept on sort of zigging, and meandering out into the bay, chasing deep enough water so that he could have access to the water at any time. He was in the boat rental business.

Dunning: I was wondering about Mr. Keller.

Vincent: He rented boats during the Depression days. He was renting his boats at a very nominal fee--it was very, very low. He had to have access to the water at most any time to stay in business. On this side of the boathouse right down there on that nice beach, that was a hangout for people.

It had a sun pocket, even in the wintertime. Winds from the north come over the top. It made a desirable spot to meet and talk. Along the beach there were many boats. Keller kept his big boats out there, particularly during the off season.

Then there was a fellow that owned a boat that was about eighteen feet long, an old time gaff rig sloop. Invariably it kept leaking, and he kept trying one way or another to keep it from leaking. He put pitch in the bottom, another time cement. He tacked copper sheathing on the outside. One way or another he would just keep on working trying to make the boat seaworthy. So he would be doing that during the off season or winter season. When the spring came, he would moor it out there. It was fun to watch somebody just puttering away doing something. That was a very nice hangout I recall from my early days.

You can't see it, but right below here, right along the beach, along this embankment, and then just right over here, there is a culvert. It goes under the railroad tracks. This allowed bay water to enter the marsh area that reached all the way from the railroad track to this road.

Dunning: Was this whole area marsh?

Vincent: This whole area was just marshland when I first knew it. It had the typical pattern of a slough, with its little arms running out into the marsh. It was just like a tree. What's interesting about this is how the marsh has been almost completely filled over a period of years. [water flowing]

Dunning: Do you recall when it started being filled?

Vincent: That was back in the twenties and thirties. It started being filled. They starting filling it on the other end. It was a dumping ground for the dredging spoils that were obtained when the dredging was done at the Santa Fe terminal. The area at Ferry Point is fairly shallow, and it had to be kept deep enough to not only take care of the ferry boats and the tug boats which were used with the barging operations, but they were also handling lumber schooners, which came down from the north, laden with lumber. They used to tie up at the dock.

After a few years, it would fill in and they would have to dredge. This was done with a suction dredger which scoured the bottom of the bay. A rotary cutter ahead of the suction line picked up a slurry of mud which was pumped through large lines underneath the railroad track into the marsh area.

I don't know if we want to drive down there or not. I think we'll walk over there. It might be better. [tape stops]

[bird sounds]

Approaching Ferry Point on Foot

Vincent: The road to the Santa Fe was where that gate is right there. For many, many years, this property was all open. The commuters and people meeting people at the ferry or the train over at the terminal just drove right on through. It was just an open road. This fence is actually something that came on here later.

[heavy machinery sounds]

Let's go over here a second while we're in this area. For a number of years, I think I mentioned in my memorandum, [see appendix] there was a ferry terminal here at the foot of Garrard Boulevard providing ferry service to San Francisco. They had a scheduled run for automobiles and passengers. It docked right in this section here. What you see over there on that sector is a portion of the dock which still remains after dismantling most of the other part of the pier. That particular pier along there was used for fishing. I see now that they are tearing out more of it. The City made a big deal about it being so dangerous. For the few people standing on the pier, and with the barricades and all, to me it was not dangerous. But it was part of the old hassle of trying to keep people away from this area.

Dunning: It looks like they're putting up barbed wire fencing today.

Vincent: You can see now they are really going to keep it blocked off so people just can't come in. I should take a picture of that just to complete the picture. That protects the Petromark site.

Terminal_No._1

Dunning: What is that white building at the end?

Vincent: That's the original terminal number one. That was the beginning of Richmond's efforts to make a big deal out of their shipping business. Every so often ships came here. I do recall them when I was a boy. I think some of the more attractive ones were those from Great Britain.

It was always known that Great Britain manufactured beautiful, lovely woolens. It wasn't unusual at that time for the mate or some of the crew to be peddling things from their homeland. People used to come to the dock and barter for pure British woolens. I remember that as part of my early experience. Terminal number one was built after the completion of the tunnel and Garrard Boulevard, about 1915.

Dunning: How did this particular beach look? [by Terminal Number One]

Vincent: The beach is essentially the same as it's always been. The edge of that property over there has been used for dumping materials to some extent, as you can see. It was always a rather popular place for fishing. People came down browsing to look at the bay and watch the ducks. This whole area, for example, here and all around, down the railroad track, all the way to Point Richmond, was open to people who wanted to go walking and fishing.

The dock itself, although they didn't have a fence across it at that time, was off limits. Someone on duty would discourage people from going onto the dock.

Dunning: I'm a little confused as to the relation between this dock and the Santa Fe dock?

Vincent: The distant one is the Santa Fe dock. This one was owned by the Southern Pacific Company. If I recall correctly, it operated a car and passenger service to San Francisco for only a few years. It just didn't have enough business, as you could guess. The Santa Fe dock, I'll tell you more about that when we get over there.

[bird singing]

This is the roadway that I was mentioning. It was the access road from Garrard Boulevard--now Dornan Drive--over to the Santa Fe terminal.

Dunning: Did they have a parking lot in here or was it just for walking on the road?

[much of the following is covered up by noise of microphone breaking up in wind]

Vincent: There was a parking lot over by the terminal. The terminal was encased in a long shed that went all the way from the dock, from the shoreline way back to about opposite here, probably three or four-hundred feet long, or more. It was open at each end, apart from the shed. It was about forty feet high. Each side had windows, old-fashioned wooden casement windows, about three feet by about five feet. As a matter of fact, I have some of those old windows in my shop at home. They lasted a long time. The shed must have been built when the ferry terminal was built--shortly after 1900. So that's a long time.

Dredging Ferry Point and Its Effects on Keller's Beach

Dunning: The view of the hills [across Dornan Drive] looks like a pastoral scene.

Vincent: It was that. In the early days when I was here, there was just nothing to interfere with it. It had ample poison oak.

Dunning: Did you actually go climbing up on the hills?

Vincent: Yes, it was a proper place to go for a hike. I got discouraged from going. I'm very sensitive to poison oak. I can't look at it without catching it, so I tended to spend most of my time on the beach. That rock formation that I mentioned came to about here. It was large.

Dunning: When was that?

Vincent: That would have been, perhaps in the forties. I'm not sure when that rock was taken out. I think some of it was used to help fill that area on the other side, the marsh area, as a base for the Wickland Oil storage tanks. The reason I mentioned the marsh area and the dredging at Ferry Point was for the purpose of describing how it affected Keller's Beach and his boat rental operation. They dumped the mud and water slurry in here on the South end. The water from the slurry, erosion from the soft mud during the rainy season, and the ebb and flow of the tides helped move the newly placed dredger spoils underneath the railroad track at the north end there, next to Keller's Beach, where it re-established itself right in front of his place.

After each dredging period, Mr. Keller had to keep on extending his dock. His dock was made with old piling butts, and anything that was fairly substantial. It was a dock that would support people, but not much

more. He and his friends would dig holes at low tide and jam pile butts into them. They would fabricate and keep extending a rather fragile dock further out into the bay. It was quite a long dock, all for the purpose of trying to stay away from the mud which was picked up by a dredger, pumped into the marsh, and much of it worked its way back again to the bay. In time some of it would be coming back to Ferry Point by the outgoing tide which runs out right along the beach.

Dunning: There must be photographs.

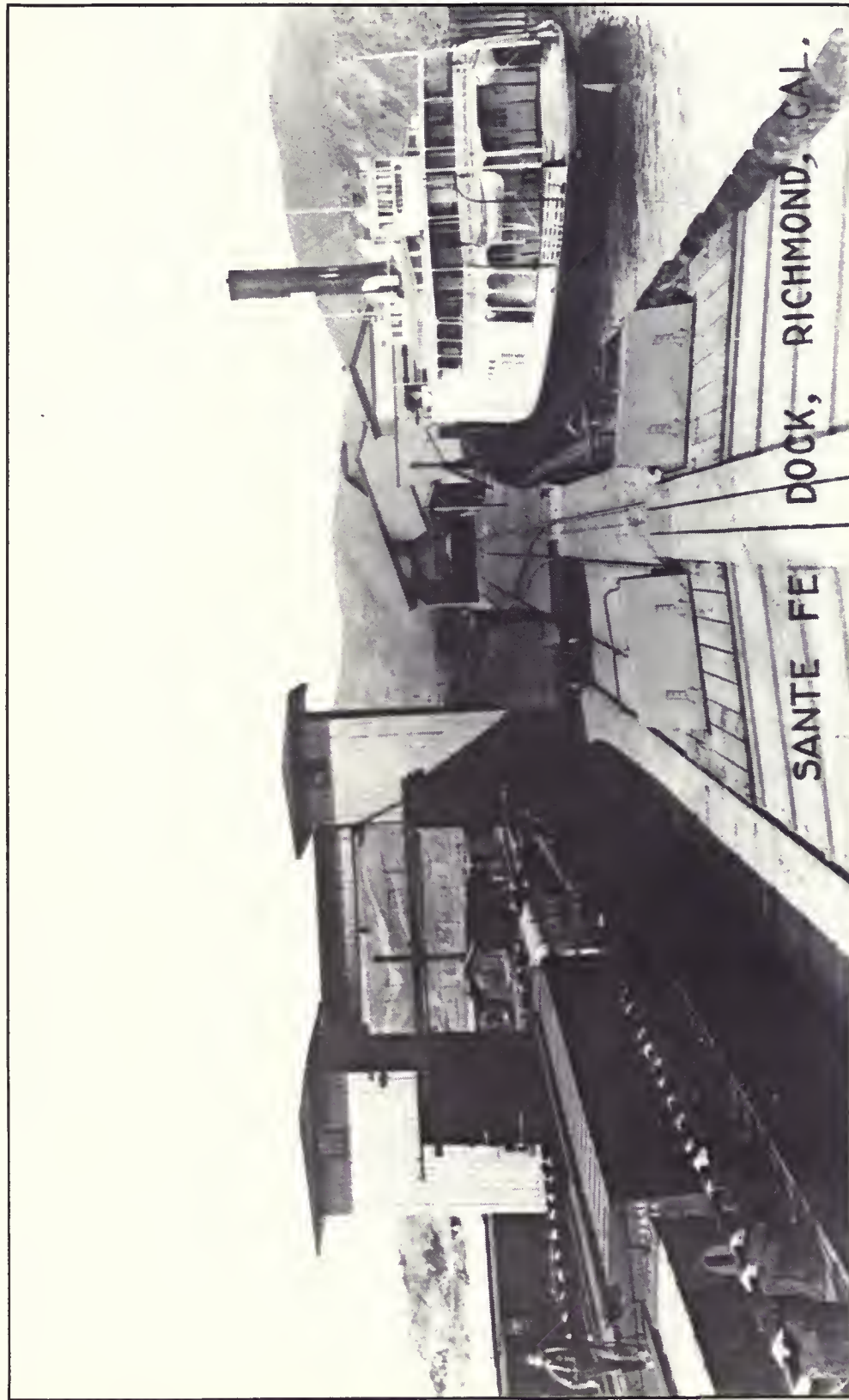
Vincent: I'm trying to think. I'm not so sure that I have one. We had one of the old Kodak cameras that was about postcard size. It cost about a quarter for each picture. A quarter was a big quarter in those days. So you didn't go around taking pictures except at picnics and that sort of thing, or birthdays. It had to be a special situation to justify the taking of a picture.

Ferry_Landing_Ramp

Dunning: Do you know what's on the other side of this?

Vincent: That's a typical loading ramp design. It's hinged on the shore end. Down on the outer end, it's supported by cables which go over large wheels on a large elevated tower. On the other side of the wheels are counterweights, which are just about the same weight as the loading ramp, but not as heavy. You want to have some positive tendency for the ramp to outdo the heavy counterweights. There is an auxiliary power source, so you can impose a load on this almost balanced system, so that the ramp can be raised or lowered in order to accomodate the change of tide.





Santa Fe Terminal, Point Richmond, circa 1910-1914.

A barge loaded with thirteen freight cars is on the left and on the right, the passenger ferry "San Pablo" which was in operation between 1900 and 1930. Lumber schooners from the Northwest were also unloaded with lumber from the Standard Oil Company refinery.

Photograph courtesy of the Richmond Museum Collection

Text by J.A. Vincent

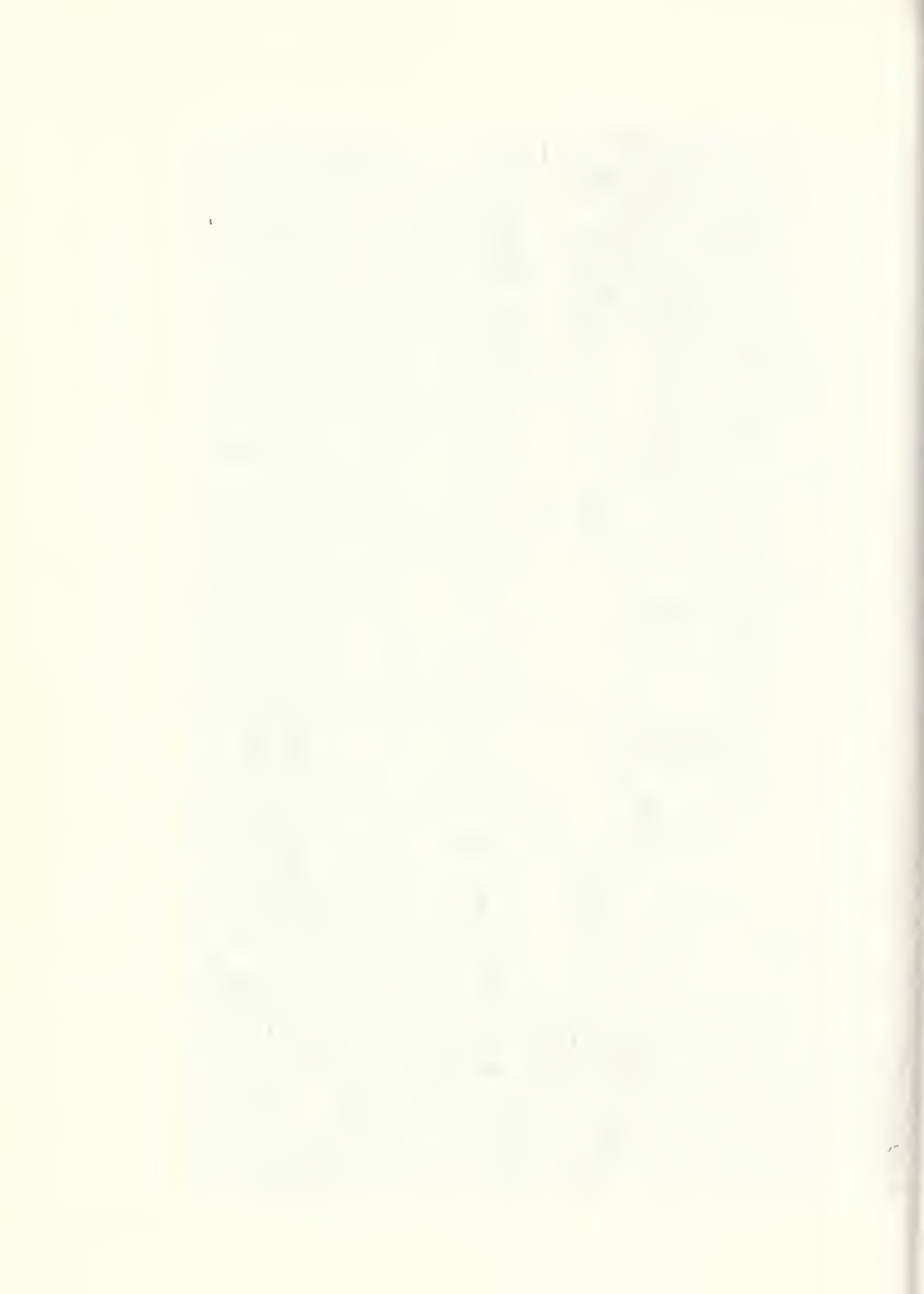




San Pedro Ferry, Richmond - San Francisco service, circa 1914.

Two stacked "San Pedro" - pride of the Santa Fe fleet for twenty-three years. Her fine hull and engine, product of the Union Iron Works, continued to serve after the Santa Fe abandoned service in 1934. She was renamed "Treasure Island" and operated for the Key System in the ferry route to the World's Fair in 1939 and 1940.

*Photograph courtesy of the Richmond Museum Collection
Text by J.A. Vincent*





West Garrard Blvd. (now Dornan Drive), Point Richmond, circa 1915.

West Garrard Blvd. and tunnel was built in 1914-15 to serve Richmond's Terminal No. 1 which was constructed in 1915-18 to serve ocean going steamers. It also provided access to the Santa Fe terminal at Ferry Point (upper right). The large body of water between Garrard and the railway dike serving Ferry Point is now the Miller Knox Regional Park.

*Photograph courtesy of the Richmond Museum Collection
Text by J.A. Vincent*

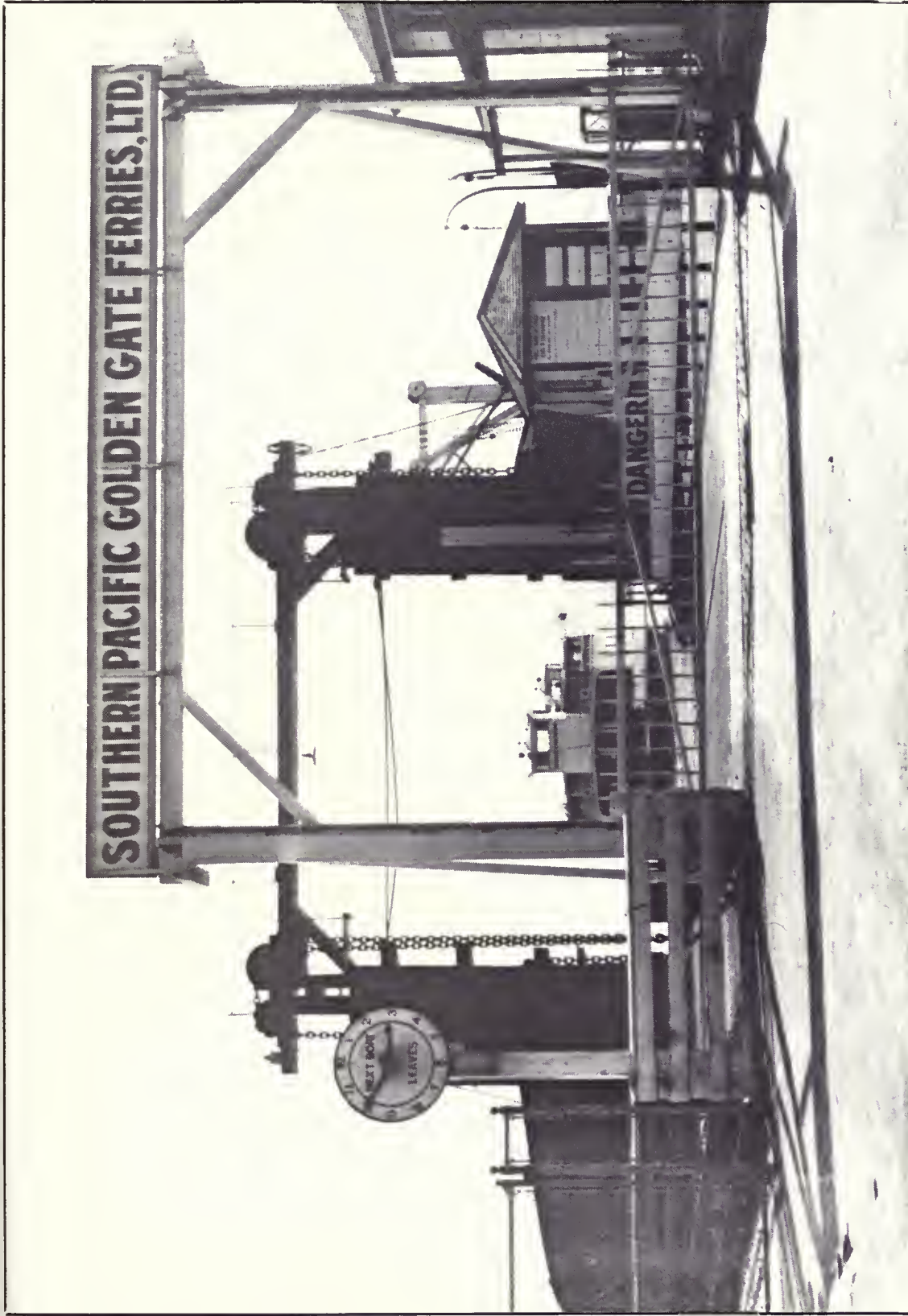




Typical railway coaches of the 1920s and 30s.

Photograph courtesy of the Richmond Museum Collection





Southern Pacific Golden Gate Ferry at the foot of Garrard Blvd. (now Dornan Drive). The auto ferry provided service to San Francisco beginning in 1927 and shut down in 1936.

Photograph courtesy of the Richmond Museum Collection



Richmond youth enjoying an afternoon of fishing at Ferry Point, 1985.

Photograph by Judith K. Dunning



As the barges or ferry boats used to come in, you had to have the ramp at the right position so that the loading deck and the ramp could engage each other. In the case of the barges and freight operations, these railroad tracks had to match up with the railroad tracks that were on the large freight barges which were moved by tug between Ferry Point and San Francisco.

The ferry boat was a little bit different. It had to be just above the deck level of the ferry boat. Then there was a little drop-down apron on the outer end to make the final engagement so people and the wagon trains carrying the baggage could be moved easily and without someone tripping or falling as they went off of the ramp and onto the ferry boat or vice versa.

The ferry boat used to operate through here. They used to come in about through here. All of those facilities have been torn out. The railroad tracks used to go right down through this area, right through here. You can still see remnants of the old pavement.

Dunning: Almost to the driveway?

Vincent: Yes, in fact, it was just about through here. From there on over, and from here to a distant area of several hundred feet, there was this enclosed shed so that people could get on and off the trains without getting wet. They had some protection from the weather. I think there were definitely two railroad tracks that used to come in. Sometimes a train would be waiting to leave, another one would be pulling in. So the ferry would bring people in that were going somewhere, and then they would take people that were going back to San Francisco. You had these two train tracks right into the station itself.

Dunning: Most people really didn't get off and spend any time in Richmond. They just disembarked here and they were on their way to San Francisco?

Early Ferry Boats: the Ocean Wave, San Pablo, and San Pedro

Vincent: Yes. Going that way. That's right. This was the terminus of the Atcheson Topeka and the Santa Fe. It started in 1900. Its first loading of a train from San Francisco was in 1900. The ferry boat they used at that time, as I recall, was acquired from British Columbia. It was called the Ocean Wave. It had been in passenger service, with cabins and such. It was purchased, brought here, modified, and put into ferry service. That was the first ferry that the Santa Fe ran. Then they built one in about 1904. They built an additional one, a larger one, in 1911. The first one was named San Pablo. The second one was the San Pedro. The San Pedro was a longer one, and more efficient than the initial design. She was one of the finest ferries on the San Francisco Bay.

The San Pedro was de-commissioned after the ferry service was discontinued in 1933, and joined the San Pablo tied up at the end of a service wharf out west of here. The San Pedro, after not being in service for six years was purchased by the Key System ferry company. It was renamed Treasure Island and was back in operation for the World's Fair in 1939 and 1940.

Dunning: The Exposition.

Vincent: The Exposition where Treasure Island is located. They had ferry slips there. In order to move people in quantity they had several ferries operating. The old San Pedro, which I used to ride to San Francisco many years later, was back in service in 1939. After those two years, I'm not sure what happened to it.

End_of_Ferry_Service_Era_in_San_Francisco_Bay

Vincent: By that time the bridges were in and the ferry service essentially collapsed. The San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge was completed in 1936.

At one time, as I recall, there were as many as fifty ferries operating at the same time on this bay, taking care of people going into Alameda and Oakland. And then the Key System, which was further down this way. There were ferries to Richmond, to Sausalito, and Tiburon. Then there was a ferry going to Vallejo. There was a tremendous amount of activity at one time.

Dunning: The San Francisco Bay must have looked completely different with all that activity. Ferries are beautiful.

Vincent: It was an exciting time. It was extremely exciting when you rode the ferry to San Francisco, particularly if you went over in the early morning when the commuters were going to work. They poured through that ferry building and then took off up the street, walking. Most of them did, it seemed. There was just a wave of humanity going up Market Street. If you were there late in the afternoon, or after work at night, that wave came charging back through the Ferry Building and people were heading for home. The Ferry Building was a very nice place at that time because they had a lovely electric bakery.

Dunning: What does that mean, an electric bakery?

Vincent: It means that they were using electricity to do their baking. That was one of the early times when the electrical industry was glamorizing the use of electricity, and so you had the electric bakery. Both natural gas and electricity are being used for baking, with natural gas being the most popular as it is cheaper.

Dunning: I was wondering how long it took from Richmond to San Francisco on the ferry.

Vincent: About forty-five minutes or a little less. It was a great way to travel. I have friends who used to go to San Francisco commuting to work from Berkeley. They were so upset when the ferries stopped operating. It was so nice to be able to go to the train station and take the short run on the train to the terminals in Oakland and board the ferries, and get your morning paper, a donut and coffee, and sit out on the boat and watch the city come up as you were moving in, and all the activity, the ferries coming in and the whistles blowing.

[train whistle blows]

The excitement of starting the day that way gave them a great lift. They always felt disappointed that they had to ride a bus or carpool to San Francisco after that.

Dunning: Or to sit with the rest of the commuters on the bridge; it's a very different feeling.

Views from Ferry Point

Dunning: For the purpose of the tape, can you just tell me what we're looking at right across from here?

Vincent: What you're looking at from Ferry Point--this is identified as Ferry Point because it got its name from having been used for ferry service for so many years. When you look directly to the south, you're looking at a breakwater which has been built, perhaps forty years ago. Prior to that, that was an open bay. San Fran-

cisco had very few prominent buildings at that time. They were all fairly low. The Ferry Building, in fact, at that time, was a significant part of the landscape. When you look over there today, you can hardly see the Ferry Building.

Angel Island

Vincent: On to the right is Angel Island, which was an island used for immigration service for many years. There are many stories about how they were mistreated, particularly the Chinese, when they were housed on Angel Island. It's now a park area, open to the public. It's a very delightful experience to go over and enjoy that island all the way from just taking a short-distance walk into the park and having your lunch, or taking the tractor drawn elephant train tour of the island, or if you feel energetic to climb up to the top. It's just a fantastic view of the whole Bay Area.

Raccoon Strait

Vincent: Then on to the right, there's an opening between Angel Island and Marin County. It is a deep water channel called Raccoon Strait. It has fast running currents when the tides are coming in and ebbing. Tiburon is right across, alongside the strait. It has always been, to my recollection, a very expensive place to live. It was a place for people that had it made in San Francisco to go off and establish their homes there, and commute to San Francisco, which was only a short run by ferry at that time.

California City: World War II Net Depot

Vincent: Then on to the right, you're going into California City, which years ago was a coaling station. For many years, coal was burned on steamers, before bunker fuel oil was available. Later on, during World War II, it was used as a net depot. They had equipment for laying a net across the bay from San Francisco across to Angel Island, and another net from there on over toward Sausalito and the Tiburon area, so that they could protect the bay from submarines entering the bay. It was just like a big fishing net. It was made with steel cables. It was quite an interesting period in our history.

Dunning: When was that?

Vincent: During World War II. They protected us with that net to keep the Japanese submarines from entering into our bay. There is a story that goes along with that. At that time we had so few installations that had any meaning at all, in fact, practically none so far as defense was concerned. They had some cannons stationed along the Golden Gate headlands, and Fort Cronkite and a few other places. Inland, though, at Richmond and other places where defense plants were located, there were no facilities for anti-aircraft defense.

People were greatly worried as an aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attack. The army proceeded to use telephone poles and sandbags arranged to appear as anti-aircraft artillery pieces. There were many of these fakes around Richmond and the Bay Area. That was our national defense at that time against the enemy. That story is many years later than when I was here. That's a part of the total defense scheme in relation to the net keeping to keep the bad guys out.

Dunning: Did they actually take the net out, or is it still there?

Vincent: Yes, they got rid of that net just as soon as they could.

Dunning: I wonder what it did to the fish.

Vincent: Fish, I think, got right on through. This net was made with large openings--I don't know what they call the gauge of a net. It would be ample to trap a submarine and not stop fish from going through.

Dunning: They never caught a submarine, right?

Vincent: The enemy was too smart for that.

I'll soon be showing you where I lived when I first came to Ferry Point in 1923. You can see by looking at the [No Trespassing] sign here, the Santa Fe and the City of Richmond love to have people down here. [wind breaks up microphone] You can see here, "Warning: Unauthorized Personnel not Allowed Beyond this Point. Code Chapter 1168, Richmond Police Department, 423-1285." Well, this is Ferry Point.

Dunning: As far as you know, do they ever stop anyone for trespassing?

Vincent: I don't really know.

Dunning: I wondered because I've been down here trespassing myself.

Vincent: I doubt that anything is done.

##

Fire on the Loading Pier, Early 1980s

[sound of birds]

Dunning: You were starting to tell me about the fire on the pier.

Vincent: Yes. We are now looking at one section of the pier that was used for loading barges. There is only one barge loading facility at this time. At one time there were two barge loading facilities located here, along with a ferry slip to the left. A fire of unknown origin brought the operation here to a close. However, it is interesting that it was fairly well known in the industry that the Santa Fe was contemplating the closing of this operation anyway.

Dunning: Put two and two together or--?

Vincent: It was just by coincidence perhaps. [laughs]

Dunning: This was in the early seventies?

Vincent: No, this was only about two or three years ago. This is of fairly recent origin. You can see what it did, how hot this fire was. They used creosote on the piling in order to keep the termites from eating into them and destroying them. So when they start burning it has a lot of fuel. You can see it's made quite a mess of things here. Look at the shapes of those rails. That tells you how hot they got. They got hot, and as they expanded they had to go somewhere, and they just put bows in them. You see that right there. That was hot.

Dunning: Do you actually recall the fire?

Vincent: I heard about it later. I didn't actually come down and see the fire.

The Santa Fe Pumphouse and Boiler Room

Vincent: When we first came to Ferry Point, the pumphouse and boiler room were in a low building right close to the tracks here. It was a one-story building made of corrugated metal. That plant supplied steam for heating the fuel oil, which was kept in an underground tank adjacent to the tracks. The tank was supplied by the Standard Oil company in tank cars. The tank cars were heated before being discharged into the underground storage tanks. When the tugs and the ferry came in for fuel, it was necessary for the pumphouse pumps to start pumping from this underground storage, which meant that this heavy fuel oil had to be heated in order to make it fluid enough to be pumped. It was quite viscous otherwise.

One of the assignments of the personnel here was to maintain the boilers and the pumps. They also had an air compressor for supplying air to the workmen's air-driven tools when they were working on the dock. It was a fairly busy assignment at times for people working at the pumphouse.

As I mentioned, it was a small corrugated building right there. On the other side of it at that time was a boxcar which had been converted into a paint storage and supply locker to accommodate the needs of the tugboats and ferries. Over to my right, another boxcar had been set up with a lean-to type of attachment for additional room. That was our home right between here and the bay.

Dunning: You were right on the bay.

Vincent: There was a small little dock that butted out just over the edge of the bay right there. Our front door led out to just right there. There was the bay. Then from here on out towards the northwest a bit, there was a work dock and tie-up place for the tugboats and for the ferry boat when they were out of operation or undergoing repairs. That was a high activity dock with plenty of foot traffic. It led right past our house, right behind it, in fact.

That was the beginning of our living here. Eventually the pumphouse was rebuilt and made into a concrete structure which is still standing. This small building to the right of us became the storage house for supplies.

Dunning: Where did your father work in relation to these buildings?

Vincent: He worked right there.

Dunning: In the pumphouse?

Vincent: Yes. He was one of the stationary engineers. They used to work on shift. There were three shifts a day. And they worked seven days a week. In those days, the Santa Fe didn't give you days off. You worked seven days a week, and there were no vacations. The pay at that time, in the 1920s, I think, was on the order of seventy-six dollars a month, or not much more. The Santa Fe, generally typical of railroading operations of that time, had a way of exacting their toll out of people.

Dunning: And then, of course, he was right there for any emergency.

Vincent: He was right there, yes.

Memories of Santa Fe Families Living at Ferry Point

Dunning: Did the other two pump men also live here?

Vincent: One of the pumpmen lived right over here. Another lived across, on the other side of the station. They were all in the proximity of their work. They didn't have to go far.

Dunning: Were the pump families the only people living right on this location?

Vincent: Yes, except for a time when the ferry boats were operating there was a station master's house, which was on the outside of the big train shed. He lived right next to his job, too. Then there was also a telegraph operator who also manned the ticket office. You had a train master and a ticket fellow collecting and selling tickets. There was a fairly good size waiting room--about seventy-five by one hundred feet--at the end of the train shed, so that there was a place to wait.

I used to work as a janitor when I was in high school, on weekends. On Saturday part of my job was the sweeping of the ticket office and waiting room. Then I used to work in the evenings, helping unload baggage, mail and freights when the trains were coming and going. That was primarily during the weekend.

Dunning: You mentioned before that your mother had a garden right outside the boxcar.

Vincent: Yes, that was just a little bit of a garden at that time. And then right across on the other side is where our larger house was located. Let's walk on over there, we can see it better.

The better housing was one that had been built as a house. That was located right over there, on the northside of this storage house. It had a little garden. There were sheds built right across the back of it, small storage sheds. We had a place for chickens, and we had rabbits for a while, and a garden.

Eventually, before I actually left here, I built a one-room apartment using windows from the train station. It was literally built right on the edge of the beach, overhanging the edge of the bank right here. I could hear the waves beating on the rocks right behind me. So I had an elegant view of the bay.

Dunning: You just did that independently as a child, like a tree house?

Vincent: No, actually, I built that about the time I was in college. That was just the tail end of my staying here, actually.

Dunning: You needed a place of your own.

Vincent: Even though I had a place of my own, I didn't use it very much. Actually I had a deaf uncle and his deaf friend who came out here from Oklahoma. They needed a place to stay and somehow I got put back into the main house where I was before. I didn't get much use of it. But at least I did for some time. It was very enjoyable while it lasted, living on the edge of the bay.

Between the house there and over here, I built a twenty-three foot Bear boat, a wooden boat. A Bear-class. It became one of the largest one design classes in the bay. There were seventy-five or more of them all together. Many of them were built at home. They were started by a professional boat-building shop in Sausalito. We eventually got the plans from them, and

a number of people at the Richmond Yacht Club built Bears. Some of them got the hulls partially built and completed them. Others of us started from scratch.

I had a shed built right over the top here, near that yellow building there. I had this for two years as my place for building my boat, a two year project. I launched it right off through here. This brings back many memories. It was also our first two years of marriage and our first child. Barbara and I were married in June 1937.

Dunning: You had everything right here.

Vincent: Yes, out here, yes.

Dunning: Let's look around this corner for a minute.

Vincent: This bank has eroded away considerably from the time I was here. I would estimate that the erosion that has taken place here is on the order of twenty to thirty feet, just from wave action.

Dunning: Was this always a rocky beach?

Vincent: Always rocky. There was one small beach to the north that had smaller rocks on it. That was a bit more popular because at least you could sit on the beach. It was a popular place to fish and picnic.

Dunning: Did you feel safe here all the time?

Vincent: Oh, yes.

Dunning: In terms of intruders?

Vincent: We never had a problem. The only thing that we thought about was watching it when you went across the tracks because if there happened to be an engine way down and

they were pushing cars and they were being moved quietly you might get hit. That was the only thing we had to be concerned about.

Lumber Schooners

Dunning: Did the water ever come up? Did you ever have really high tides?

Vincent: No, never dangerously.

Dunning: No dramatic stories?

Vincent: No dramatic stories here. What I used to enjoy doing, particularly as we first lived over in this first house here, was to go out and look for driftwood planks that would drop off of lumber schooners when they were unloading at that long wharf, which you saw, the wharf out ahead. The lumber schooners used to stay on the west side of that. When they were unloading it was not uncommon for them to spill some of their lumber. I was always looking for it. Particularly if the wind or tide was coming this way, I was there with a pike pole to go out and spear it.

I had quite an accumulation of this lovely fresh rough saw lumber. I used to dream about building a boat with it. The fact that it was rough didn't bother me too much. Somehow you always felt you would take care of that. I never really used it that way, but as a sort of a childhood dream and finding pieces that could help you make the dream. Taking the driftwood as it came off the lumber schooners was part of it.

Dunning: There was a kind of a heritage that came with it.

Striped Bass Waiting in the Shadow

Vincent: Yes. We used to fish right off the rocks behind the pumphouse there. This long dock that went off out into the bay used to be a favorite spot too--not too favored, but it was a favorite spot for one of the pumphouse people who loved to catch striped bass. He got to be quite efficient about spearing them at night time. You're not supposed to do that.

The lights on the dock cast a shadow underneath the dock. It used to be a certain time of the year, and certain tides. You could often find striped bass just waiting there in the shadow, waiting for something in the light to come by. They were fishing there. The pumper loved to fish and would spend much time there with his long spear, which had several barbs on it. He used to do quite well. Occasionally I tried it. I'm not sure that I ever caught one.

Dunning: Was that a private pier?

Vincent: That was the Santa Fe's pier.

Dunning: But the public could also use it.

Vincent: No, the public didn't. Just the night watchman. In fact, when he was on duty, he spent much of his time keeping an eye out for fish.

You see, there's such a beautiful glorious view across this bay.

Dunning: You can see San Quentin. Of course, the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge wasn't there. And I'm sure there was a lot more activity at Long Wharf.

Vincent: Yes, it was a very active place. It was just a nice place to live. I enjoyed it immensely. You can perhaps understand my concern about this whole area being converted into a tank farm. When you have once lived and enjoyed soaking up this beautiful scenery that's available to you in all directions--whether you look one way or the other, it's beautiful. The hills in the distance, the view of the City and Mount Tamalpais, and the boating activity going by.

Dunning: The Chevron tanks directly across from us, were most of those up?

Vincent: Most of those weren't there at that time.

Dunning: Was that a pretty bare hill?

Vincent: That was a bare hill, and all that big cut to the left, that quarrying operation was not visible when I lived at Ferry Point.

Dunning: That's by Point Molate?

Vincent: Yes, that's right. Just as you are heading toward Point Molate from the freeway. Those tanks were not there. There were very few houses in Point Richmond at that time. They were just here and there across the landscape. There used to be a colony of beach houses right next to the end of the Long Wharf. There was a beach area along there. They had a number of simple beach-type cabins and a number of lockers. That used to be a place where people had their rowboats, and they went fishing or rowing off of the shore.

Dunning: Was that public beach?

Vincent: That was a public beach. You could go down and use it.



Restoring a San Francisco Crab Boat

Vincent: At that time, when I was here, there used to be a lovely boat that would come sailing up across here at times. I eventually went over to find out who owned it. It was an old sea captain. He had his dog, and he had this lovely boat. To me it just looked interesting and intriguing to see somebody sailing out there when I wanted to own a boat, which I didn't at that time. It was an old crabbing boat with a gaff rigged mainsail and jib.

He eventually died, and then someone else bought it. It was on the beach for a while and a keel was put on it, but it was never finished. Eventually it was sold to someone else, and it was moved to the Inner Harbor, and was essentially marooned on the marsh. I found it and purchased it for, I think, thirty dollars. I rowed into the Inner Harbor Channel on my way to Ferry Point. I came out behind a tug--actually it was a barge, a motorized barge. I just got in the suction behind the barge and got a free ride to Ferry Point. I broke free of the barge and rowed to the beach behind our house.

My home was right over there. With a lot of help the boat was moved to our large backyard, where I caulked it and painted it, put a wooden keel on it, and made sails for it out of J.C. Penney muslin. It was my boat during the first couple of years in college.

But I had very little time to use it. I did sail it. They called them crab boats, San Francisco Bay crab boats. They were used for fishing and crabbing in the inner bay, whereas the larger, double-ended fishing boats that were more commonly used came from the Mediterranean. The Italians and others brought them here, their lateen rigged boats were used for crabbing on the outside. There were stories about crab boats

going to sea when the sailing ships were coming in. They used to toss a line up to these ships and put aboard someone who was hawking their wares. It might be a ship chandler, or a food supplier, or someone else. They would try to meet ships far out to sea in order to outdo their competitors.

This little boat that I owned was one of those early boats. There was a certain excitement about owning one of those early boats. It was well designed, seaworthy, with beautiful lines. After two years I sold it to Dan Keller for seventy-five dollars. It became one of his rental boats.

Fishing Boats at Point San Pablo

Dunning: In terms of fishing boats, would most of those leave from Point San Pablo Harbor?

Vincent: Yes, from the Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor and on around the tip there, past that red warehouse that you see out there all the way to the end at Point San Pablo. Have you driven all the way out to the end?

Dunning: By the old whaling station?

Vincent: Yes, out there, and all the way around this turn. I understand they used to have as many as a hundred boats fishing for sardines. There were several fish reduction plants along the San Pablo Bay waterfront. It was a mecca for the fishing boats to go there with their catch for processing. What's interesting right now, is a proposal by some fishermen who are trying to re-establish the old Red Rock warehouse as a place for bringing in their fresh fish. They contend that they have difficulty going into San Francisco and finding a place to unload their boats because the warehousing situation there is controlled by the Italians.

Dunning: In San Francisco?

Vincent: Yes. If you're not an Italian, you don't rate having a chance to unload your fresh fish. So they're trying to get something going again which they can control. It's interesting how some parts of history keep on sort of repeating itself.

Dunning: And then the old whaling station is actually a rendering plant.

Vincent: Yes, it's a rendering place. The site of an abandoned plant can be seen at the tip itself, Point San Pablo. If you look at that concrete block that's there--it's kind of broken now--on the backside of it, you can see some iron rings. Those were the places where the tackle was attached to pull whales right up the long sloping dock-like arrangement for processing.

Controversy Over Public Access

The Red Rock Warehouse Project

Incidentally, that area is now considered open space for public use. There's a bit of a controversy going on with the Port staff. We want it developed as a small view park. They argue that you haven't done anything for all these years with it, so you must have no interest in it. Well, certain things come first. Those who have the port operation are trying to essentially knock out any public access. But that is public access right now. Having been a strong advocate of public access for a long time, that's one of my fights, to try to keep it.

Dunning: The proposal to get that Red Rock warehouse as a museum certainly went down the drain.

Vincent: Yes, it did. That was, I think, a rather phony deal. Why should so many letters be written along the same theme, talking about the hazards of driving a car out to Point San Pablo? Of course, mixed up in that whole scheme of things is the fact that some of the principals were those who had been advocating a card room.

Dunning: A card room?

Vincent: A card room for gambling. That's quite a story in itself. They weren't pushing for it out there. But it just happened that one of the principals involved, who was pushing for a restaurant and a museum, carried with him the stigma of having been the one who was also associated with trying to get built a card room and restaurant by the racetrack in Albany, on the point by Point Isabel. They were also the ones that were trying to get one in the Richmond area. People were objecting to that. That had something to do with the reaction against the Red Rock warehouse project.

I hope to see the open space developed in a simple way as an observation place so that people with their friends can go out and take a look at the beautiful bay and the shipping activity and the pleasure boats. All that is needed is a simple viewing area.

It's a continuing fight, though. All this land along the bay is becoming--well, there's less of it, and the prices are going up and the demand for it is going up. It's going to be a continuing hassle trying to keep public access. That's what's involved here. For some of us who have no particular interest in any development aspect at all, but strictly from the standpoint of just public access, we feel very strongly about keeping as much of this area available to fish or just look at boats, or just enjoy the bay.

Why should the bay be boxed off by fencing? Like you see going on over there now [pier at end of Dornan Drive]. They're installing more and more of that Cyclone fencing with the chicken wire on top. It gives you an idea of the battle that's just getting under way. It'll be interesting to see how it works out.

I'm certainly surprised to see so much erosion takes place out there. This is a good example of how over the years the shoreline just keeps on going back and back, because it was well out there when I lived here. You wouldn't think these rocks would be so vulnerable to being knocked out like that.

Swimming in Point Richmond

More on the Richmond Plunge (Natatorium)

Dunning: They're pretty substantial boulders. Would you actually swim around here? Or would you go to Keller's?

Vincent: You would go to Keller's Beach or to the cove. Cozy Cove was a popular spot for swimming. We had the "Plunge," built in 1926, the Richmond Plunge. That was a beautiful plunge. We enjoyed that so much. It was free on Wednesday nights and Thursday nights. Junior high school people could get in free. Right after school it was free. We used to run down to Macdonald Avenue and get on the First Street car and head out to get our free swim. It holds a lot of fond memories for me because I saw it as a vacant lot. I saw it being built. And then just a few years ago we got involved when they were going to tear it down. I got very much involved with another fellow, headed up the committee that got involved and said, "Hey, look, you're not going to tear it down."

Dunning: I'm glad someone was in there, because it seems to be so well used.

Vincent: It is. The story of the plunge and its early days, and also its re-construction would take a whole lot of time. That was a case where a lot of people said you can't do this to us, and we won. I try to make a habit of winning. But it takes sometimes a lot of patience before you get there.

I used to walk to school right up through here along the track. That was our way to get there in a hurry.

Dunning: And then you would go through Garrard tunnel rather than the railroad tunnel?

Vincent: Yes, we would go up over the top. I always remember we had a dog named Mickey. That dog would be looking down the tracks watching for us. He would spot us and come rushing to greet us. There's nothing like a dog that's happy to see you after being away all day.

[train whistle]

Vincent: I always remember that. Something happened to Mickey. He was stolen. I remember the old KRE radio station operated by the Oakland Tribune, which included lost animals as part of their "Uncle Bob" after school program for kids. Almost nightly we would hear that. So we wrote a letter to Uncle Bob, "Please tell people that if they see a dog, such-and-such, please give it back." You know, when you fall in love with an animal at that certain age it is hard to accept their loss. I will always remember Mickey. He was, I think, a mix of German shepherd and collie.

Richmond Yacht Club

Vincent: I graduated from the University of California in '35. Then I got married in '37 and we moved out from here.

Dunning: You moved away from the waterfront?

Vincent: Yes.

Dunning: I would think that would have been difficult.

Vincent: It was difficult. But I had my boat and I was involved in building the Richmond Yacht Club and had the opportunity there to enjoy the bay from that standpoint. The Richmond Yacht Club, which you've probably seen before, had its fiftieth anniversary a couple of years ago. That brings back a lot of memories. Building the club, and bit by bit it got moved here and there. It's permanent now.

It's larger than ever, and it's permanently on the land. All they have to do now is manage what they have. It's a big operation. It's all done by volunteers except for a paid secretary who works about a half day. Then they have a couple, a young couple, who take care of the food catering and bar on the weekends. Other than that, the management is all volunteers, the officers and the board of directors are all volunteers. It's a big challenge. It's a very responsible job. There's a lot of work associated with that many people and so many activities going on. Tremendous.

Dunning: While we're here, I want to ask you about that concrete tank up on the hill. Do you know what that is?

Vincent: Yes, it's a water tank. In order to guarantee that you have fire protection in an area, you have to have a certain amount of water always available, not dependent

upon pumps to maintain pressure. That's one of the tanks that was put in some years ago in order to help keep sufficient water pressure in Point Richmond.

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Dunning: This is certainly a nice day for a tour. Mostly when I've gone out with people it's been really windy--when I interviewed by the Butler Aviation building and inside the old cannery. This is very pleasant here.

Vincent: It didn't look that encouraging. It looked like it might rain for a while.

Petromark's Proposal to Build Storage Tanks

Dunning: Where exactly did Petromark want to build their storage tanks?

Vincent: I'll show you in just a moment. [pauses] Their plan for building storage tanks was essentially a hundred feet back from the shoreline here, paralleling the shoreline, all the way up to Dornan Drive, and down this way covering this area right in front of us. This whole triangle here, all the way over to the railroad track that breaks away from the main line there, and then it goes around past Brickyard Cove. It goes over to that railroad track there. There's one large triangle here.

They would start building near Dornan Drive with ten tanks. When they were through, they would literally have this whole section boxed out in here with tanks about forty feet high. Access to the bay would still be here, but highly restricted. On one hand, they said they were concerned about the danger of

having people using this bay along here, alongside the tanks. Under such conditions, the opportunity to provide public access would be greatly diminished.

The fishing pier that you probably heard about would be one that would be just this side of that old pier over there. That was the one that's being proposed by a number of entrepreneurs, who have an interest in developing housing and commercial areas along the waterfront. They proposed to raise the money to build it. But then some feel there's something sinister about that--those developers wanting to spend all that money to build a fishing pier. You don't want to let people give you anything free, because you might be obligated.

Proposed Shoreline Study

Vincent: That was a proposal that's still around. At this time it has been deferred and placed into a so-called shoreline study funded by the City. It's being pushed. The shoreline study would include all the properties that are still a part of Richmond to find out how it might best be used on a longterm basis, taking a look at how it's now being used and what is shown on the General Plan.

For example, this is industrial land. Is that the best use for it? There are those who say, "Well, you've got to allow industry to expand." You take those tanks over on the other side of Dornan Drive and literally duplicate them over on this side, and fill in all of the land. There are those who feel that you've got to be fair to industry in that regard and let them do what they want. Is that the best thing for the city in the long run?

Dunning: That's the question right now.

Vincent: There are enough people on the council who voted and said, "Look, let's just don't go ahead with that right now." What's interesting about it is that Petromark has a lease which, technically, they could use. They could go ahead and build these tanks. What they don't have, though, is access across Dornan Drive so their pipelines could connect into the unloading operations for the ships and storage tanks already installed.

If they choose to take a product from that side and transfer it by trucks to tanks on this side, they could do so, but I don't think they want to for economic reasons. Or if they wanted to bring the product in on railcars and unload them into these tanks, they could still do that. I also doubt whether it's economical. But who knows?

Dunning: But now Petromark is presenting a \$7 million suit against the city.

Vincent: They're suing.

Dunning: I don't know if Richmond can afford a \$7 million dollar suit.

Vincent: I hope the outstanding suits can be taken care of so we can get back to being a normal sort of a city.

Brickyard Cove Area

Dunning: This is a whole other topic, but could you tell me a little bit about the development of Brickyard Cove? We could save that for maybe another time.

Vincent: Yes, we could save that. Have you seen the history of the Richmond Yacht Club?

Dunning: You showed it to me at your house, but I haven't read it.

Vincent: If you would like to look at that, that would give you the basics of the period from about 1965 or thereabouts, for the last twenty years as to the development from that time up to here. When I lived here, we used to hike over that way. They had a nice beach all along where Brickyard Cove is located. That beach was right in front of this brick-making plant. That was a very interesting operation to see. I used to go there and watch them make brick. They used raw materials from the hill behind them. That's why all that cutting behind there took place. The bricks were cured in those old-fashioned kilns. It was fun to watch the brick-making operation.

One thing that I always thought was a rather interesting story occurred after the brickmaking had died off quite a bit. They were called upon to manufacture a special aggregate for the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge. When you're making asphalt--you can see all these little rocks in here?

Dunning: Yes.

Vincent: That's the aggregate. It's a part of the mix used when making either asphalt or concrete. You have those little rocks in it. In order to save weight on the bridge, the Oakland-San Francisco Bridge, they chose to make the aggregate out of pumice. Pumice is very light.

Dunning: Soft, too.

Vincent: And very soft. So they made it into pellets which were cured in the kilns. They used this light-weight aggregate when making the concrete slabs for the highway across the bridge. That was, I thought, kind of interesting, the idea of using an old brick-making facility to make a special aggregate. That was back in the thirties.

That was an interesting area all along the shoreline. I used to enjoy hiking along the shore. I recall a project--I think it may have been for a merit badge in the Boy Scouts--I had to map an area by the use of plane table surveying. Plane table surveying is done by using a drawing board mounted on a tripod in fixed position. A straight edge with elevated pins on each end is used for making observations of prominent points in the area. Then you measure off a fixed distance and put up your plane table again and look back where you came from and get that base line all lined up. Then you take observations of the same spots previously observed. So when you get all through, you have these fixes. Then you can draw the shoreline and the facilities on it. I recall doing this with my brother in that area, way back, years ago.

I was closely associated with all this area through here. I have a certain feeling that it's my land, not to be taken away. I think we came down this way.

[sounds of machinery]

I feel that every effort should be made by both the public and industry to utilize to the very fullest every opportunity they can to make use of such a beautiful piece of property as there is in Richmond. There's so much property, if it can be jointly enjoyed, without detriment to either one, that should be done. It's awfully hard to get across that concept of sharing. As you can see here, this is no sharing.



There's a fence across here where they're talking about how dangerous it is. Let's walk down that way more, just to take another look at what's going on in there. [walk to pier at end of Dornan Drive]

Dialogue with Workman Putting up Fence near Fishing Pier

[sounds of workmen]

I've been down here when as many as twenty-five or more cars have been parked along here. People were on the dock fishing, enjoying it immensely. Now people have nothing. I remember one very young couple, a young black man and his wife. They were just two happy people. They had a pretty little baby. They were sitting there with their back up against the screen. They were fishing while enjoying a picnic lunch. Their lunch consisted of a large bottle of Seven Up, a loaf of white bread, and they had some mayonnaise. And they were making sandwiches out of that. That was their picnic. He had a minimal job, working at Church's Fried Chicken. But this is something he could afford to do. Just sitting there and enjoying the bay, he could just as well be a millionaire and he couldn't enjoy it anymore. He had his fishing pole and his family. They were just enjoying being out in the sun like today.

[group of workmen become audible]

I wonder who's doing this building. I used to fish off this dock. This fence that they're putting across here now bothers me.

Hi! [to worker] Making the place safer or something, huh? Safe for democracy?



Worker: Well, I tell you. We had a fence and a gate up there. Last weekend when I checked here, somebody took it all down. I couldn't even find a bolt.

Vincent: I'm not surprised. What you're doing is coming down and taking over a place that's been here for the last forty or fifty years where people have been coming down and fishing. They don't understand why you need to put a fence up to keep them from being able to come down and drop a fishing line in the bay. And so all of this stuff being torn out--why? Fishing on this property has been done for decades. It's hard for people to understand why somehow there should be Cyclone fences wrapped around the place.

I wouldn't be surprised if you didn't lose another fence.

Worker: The condition that we have here is a dilapidated pier.

Vincent: It's pretty bad, yes.

Worker: Now, the city has to protect itself. We posted signs and everything. I even put up some wood to discourage them from going over there. I've turned a lot of people away from here. I hate to do it. There's really no fishing area for them.

Vincent: You wouldn't have to work very hard if you really wanted to patch up that dock so people could walk on it and not fall into the bay and put a little barrier piece across here to keep people from falling out. You could probably find that much scrap somewhere and do it, if somebody felt so inclined to do it.

Worker: I know the history of this pier. I used to come down here as a kid and fish when the ferry was running.



Vincent: You remember the old ferry days, then? And they had the little restaurant right here.

Worker: That's right. I remember the time the herring used to come in here along the shore. They used to boil all night long. You could just scoop them out.

Vincent: You didn't know what to do with them after you got them home.

Worker: You see, I know about this place. In fact, when I was a kid, my folks used to take the ferry from here to San Francisco.

Vincent: I used to live over here and take the ferry boats that used to run out over there.

Worker: The Old Mole.

Vincent: The Old Mole, yes. I used to live right next to that building. I was just over there today showing it.

Worker: There used to be a lot of activity there from the ferry boats and the trains.

Vincent: If there was a dedication to making this a safe fishing pier it could be done. From the standpoint of people standing here, this dock will last a lot longer than this. You could patch it up with some wood and put asphalt over the top so it wouldn't catch fire and put a decent banister along there and people could be enjoying this.

Worker: The thing is that over by Point Pinole, over on Giant Road, they have a nice pier.

Vincent: But you have to get out and walk over there.

- Worker: I directed a couple to here yesterday. They looked like they wanted to fish. I hated to tell them. They had a little kid with them, but this place is really dangerous.
- Vincent: It's dangerous, no question. If there was an inclination to make it safe, for a nominal amount of money, you could have patched up these holes and thrown on a little layer of asphalt.
- Worker: We don't have much money now. Things are really dull. I understand your point of view.
- Vincent: The trouble is that the people that are running city hall don't give a damn about fishing out here.
- Worker: I don't agree with that. I follow the papers, too. I'm pretty well informed.
- Vincent: I just thought I'd come over and see what you were doing here.
- Worker: We're replacing the fence. Like you see, some ornery sucker will come out and take it down again. The city has to protect itself.
- Vincent: If you were a bit younger, you might be one of those ornery suckers coming down to help punch a hole in it, I bet.
- Worker: I wouldn't answer that.
- Vincent: You don't have to answer that.
- Worker: We got some of that little bad stuff [chicken wire]. I think that's going to discourage them. That's nasty stuff.
- Vincent: It's going to look like some nuclear installation somewhere.

Worker: We had two signs posted. Whoever took it down and the gate took our signs, too. I never found one nut. Evidently, they must have had a truck over the weekend.

Vincent: I've heard that Cyclone fencing in the underground market is a pretty good item. It moves easily. People have torches and clippers. They can just come in and take out a section of fencing, load it into their van and be on their way in no time.

Worker: That's probably what happened.

Vincent: We're faced with the same problem over at the marina, where it's blocked off. They work their way through and go out on the south peninsula.

Worker: You mean behind the Ford plant?

Vincent: No, over where the Butler building is. That's supposed to be blocked off and only be available for people walking or hiking or bicycling and such. But they drive in there. That's up for review right now, what to do about it. As somebody said, if you put a good barrier, people would come and just cut a section out of the fence and keep on going through anyway. It's a tough one you got there.

Worker: It's too bad though. There's a lot of shoreline there. For a while, they had proposed when they put the Miller-Knox Park in, they were going to get some kind of an easement with Santa Fe to build over and then sink a couple of barges in there to make a public pier. That would be nice.

Vincent: The cost of that again was a big item. An overpass over there.

Worker: That would be real nice over there.

Vincent: Someday, I think you'll see a pier going out here, you know the one that's being proposed right now, a fishing pier? The one that was proposed last month.

Worker: You mean a solid concrete pier?

Vincent: No, this would be built with more or less typical piling, coming in from the beach area.

Worker: You mean in this area here?

Vincent: Right here, paralleling right out here.

Worker: It would be a long dive. There's a lot of controversy about in here. I was over by Oakland, you know where the Oakland container port is, the Port of Oakland. They've got a public pier there. It's pretty nice. I went over there to see their set up.

Vincent: They've got a nice set up there.

Worker: Yes, they've got a nice deal there. They've got a little place where they sell fishing tackle and everything.

Vincent: They've got a different attitude. Attitude is a factor. Good luck.

Worker: Have a good day, now.

Transcriber: Ernest Galvan

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APPENDICES

Background Information on Ferry Point
by J.A. Vincent, Jr.

MEMORANDUM

Ferry Point was originally developed as a barge and ferry terminal to serve the western terminus of the Santa Fe Railroad. The terminal was built in 1900 and was in continuous use for both barge and ferry service (to San Francisco) through 1933 at which time the ferry service was discontinued, the passenger trains and/or buses being directed to Oakland. Barge service was discontinued in 1984 after a severe fire. The site, except for the old pump house and warehouse, including the wharf, is unencumbered. The site offers sweeping vistas of the bay, Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco, Angel Island, Marin County, Red Rock and Point Richmond with a backdrop of the hills protecting Miller Knox Regional Park.

My father worked for Santa Fe. He was assigned to Ferry Point when we moved in December 1923. I lived there for the next thirteen years. During that time I became acquainted with the hills, the sloughs, beaches and marshes of the Richmond waterfront. There were few fences and the shoreline was my front yard. The waterfront from Terminal No. 1 (where Petromark is located) to the Ferry Point Santa Fe terminal and the one mile stretch to Kellers Beach were popular fishing areas, much of it by casting from shore. Fishing from a dock by drop line near the mussel laden pilings was also very popular, less equipment was needed and it became a family affair. Kids could drop a simple line. Fishing off the dock at Terminal No. 1, the abandoned Southern Pacific ferry slips and the Santa Fe docks was common.

The Southern Pacific operated an automobile ferry for a few years from the late 1920s to the early 1930s. One wing of the ferry slip remains adjacent to Terminal No. 1. A broken down cyclone fence separates the slip from Dornan Drive. This is a very popular place for fishing, bay watching and just looking on a warm day. The fact that the dock is still standing and in use is likely due to the fact that it is protected from southerly storms by the adjoining terminal.

A few additional comments are in order with respect to the fencing which now surrounds the Santa Fe property. There was no fencing until the 1950s when a portion of the property on the western side near the old train station was leased to Richmond Tank Co. for cleaning, sandblasting and repair operation. Running between Garrard Blvd. and the Santa Fe terminal was a public street--access to the terminal and access to the houses located there. It was a road widely used by the public as access to the bay. This road was blocked by fencing installed along

Garrard Blvd. including the Southern Pacific ferry slip. Gates were installed on the road leading to the Santa Fe terminal and another across the railroad track which leads past Brickyard Cove to Levin Metals.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The bayshore and docks at Ferry Point have been used by the public for fishing, sightseeing, strolling, etc. since the area became available to the public at the beginning of this century. It doesn't take long, after a few conversations with those at the bayshore, to become convinced that there is much pleasure and need for people to have access to the bay. For many people this is the only outing they can afford. Over 500 signatures were collected on petitions when it was proposed that South Garrard be closed two years ago which without doubt expressed a public concern about public access to the bay.

The proper installation of a new fishing pier near Terminal No. 1 will fulfill a definite public need. It could well be the centerpiece for opening the whole stretch of shoreline between Terminal No. 1 and the Santa Fe docks to the public, an area that for many years was Richmond's public waterfront.

John A. Vincent, Jr.

February 20, 1985
Richmond, California

A walk above the East Bay shoreline

BY MARGOT PATTERSON DOSS

There are now 41 ½ miles of bay shoreline for the public to enjoy in the East Bay Regional Park District. It has all been acquired within the last 20 years. One of the most unusual and varied of the new shoreline parks is located in the Contra Costa hills that rise up out of the bay and extend from Ferry Point to Point San Pablo.

The area was known as The Potrero when Don Francisco Mario Castro ran his cattle on Rancho San Pablo in 1823. The name for three miles of it today is the Miller-Knox Regional Shoreline, in honor of two dedicated public servants — the late state Senator George Miller Jr. and John T. Knox, former state assemblyman and a Point Richmond resident.

Within the park is quiet, sheltered Keller Beach, as well as a long sand strand that stretches toward Ferry Point, a saltwater lagoon, good fishing in season and, best of all, a little mountain — Nicholl Nob — to climb. By some miracle, the top of these Contra Costa hills, called Potrero-San Pablo Ridge, has remained untouched through the years.

If you have never climbed around Nicholl Nob, some surprises await, for the little chain of hills that comes to a peak here was once an island, surrounded by water and marshes. The sea that surrounds it today is Industry.

For conservationists and environmentalists, the climb could well be a 20th anniversary salute to the Bay Conservation and Development Commission and to the innovative reign of recently retired park district General Manager Dick Trudeau, a former journalist who was responsible for the public acquisition of so much East Bay shoreline.

For others, it could be a hill-stride

The View From Nicholl Nob

Sunday Examiner and Chronicle,
8 September 1985

to test the leg muscles. For anyone, it can be a day of fun.

To explore this remarkable oasis, pack a picnic lunch if you wish (there are also some good restaurants at Park Place in the nearby Point Richmond Historic District) and head for the East Bay. From San Francisco and the West Bay, the best approach is via the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, in whose lee the park lies.

As you drive off the bridge, take a right on Canal Street to West Cutting Boulevard. Turn right again on Cutting to Garrard Boulevard. At Garrard, turn left and drive through a fringe of the charming little village of Point Richmond, past the Richmond Municipal Natatorium and through the tunnel under Nicholl Nob. When you leave the tunnel, you are in Miller-Knox Regional Shoreline Park, with Keller Beach on your right.

Park in the main parking lot, about half a mile farther south along Garrard Boulevard.

By public transportation, take BART to the end of the Richmond line, then AC Transit bus No. 72P to the end of its line at Point Richmond. From there, it is a short walk through the tunnel to the trailhead.

From the main parking lot, the temptation is to go immediately toward the welcome green lawns that surround the lagoon. Forebear for the present. Instead walk firmly in the opposite direction, across Garrard Boule-

vard to a little white building destined to become park field offices. (Don't confuse it with the Richmond Rantlers' building, a motorcyclists' clubhouse that stands farther north.)

Go around behind the little white building to locate the trailhead, which begins at a marsh (dry at this season) traversed by a long, angled catwalk. This is the beginning of a 2.2-mile trail that loops the ridge, climbing 368 feet to Nicholl Nob and returning to the point at its end.

From the ridge there are some unparalleled views of Marin, San Francisco and the East Bay. On the trail are several remarkable vista points, including a couple of false gun emplacements that represent an amusing footnote to World War II.

Be forewarned that this loop route, short as it is, is for mountain goats. Fortunately the land is so open, the trails lie as clear as lines on a map.

If you find the steepness of the trail is getting to your knees or wind, it is possible to take one of several shortcuts down to sea level again.

As you start across the little catwalk, make a mental note to come back for birdwatching after the rain comes. Dry as it is at this season, red-winged blackbirds were conversing in

the willow grove on the right when park ranger Berta Gardner conducted me and park staffer Tom Lindenmyer on this walk.

Follow the path uphill. When you reach a junction, turn left. (The right fork of the trail deadends at a vista point.) Follow the left path as it goes along a little bench of land, then begins to climb.

En route you will pass places where jute netting is restoring vegetation to areas of erosion left by old motorcycle trails. The views of the bay are so engrossing as they change and broaden out that you may not notice these repairs. Nature has a way of healing its wounds, especially with a little help from its friends.

The first crest you reach is False Gun Vista Point. During World War II, the shipyards of Richmond felt vulnerable to enemy attack, at a time when armament was needed elsewhere, so big, bare logs, painted olive drab to resemble cannon, were laid on circular mounds of earth to simulate gun batteries. After you have chuckled at this odd little remnant of a military deception, look down on Brickyard Cove below.

Little Brooks Island, from which the long breakwater extends, was a gun club for Trader Vic Bergeron and crooner Bing Crosby for many years.

In the heyday of ferryboats, John Muir often walked from his home in Martinez to catch the ferry to San Francisco at Ferry Point, below. Fascinating as this shoreline is, it is the San Francisco skyline and the profiles of the Tiburon peninsula and Mount Tamalpais that will make you gasp at the panorama.

When you have enjoyed this lofty resting point long enough, walk to the other "gun emplacement" at False Gun Vista Point, about 100 yards north. Then start downhill on what is known as Crest Trail. At the low point of the saddle there is a path that veers off downhill on your left toward the little white building, easily visible. Take it if your knees feel weak. Otherwise, continue to climb northerly.

You are now on your way to Nicholl Nob, named for John Nicholl, who once owned the land hereabouts.

To me, this little eminence will always be Lucretia Edwards Nob, for its last, rather than first, private owner. Lucretia and her husband, tugboat captain Tom Edwards, spent every red cent of their life savings to purchase the nob at a time when it was slated for development. Like a one-family Nature Conservancy, they held the land unchanged until the park system could purchase it.

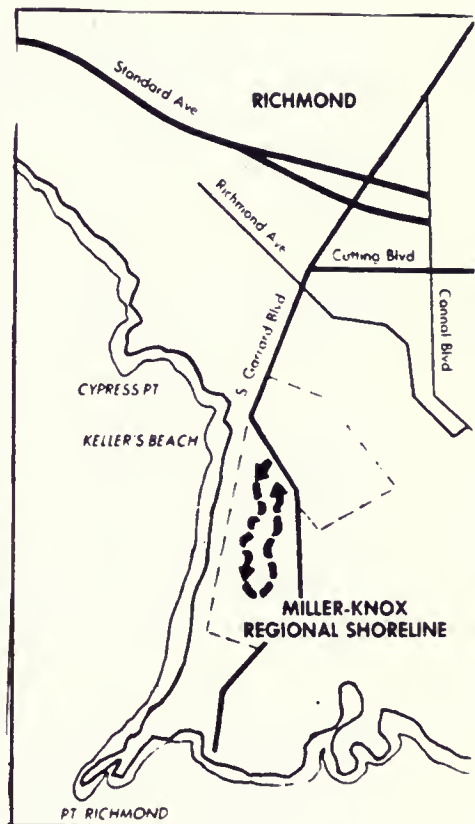
When you reach the paved road, turn right, uphill, to reach Nicholl Nob Vista Point, which has a 360-degree view. Ford Motor, Standard Oil of California, Santa Fe and the Pullman Coach company were all industrial pioneers that built below, but it was Henry Kaiser and the World War II shipbuilding industry that gave the area its biggest industrial impetus.

One would-be entrepreneur who never quite got off the ground was a man named Robert Botts, who invented a flying machine. His prototype took off from Nicholl Nob and did a nosedive into the glen below.

When you have looked over this vast area, retrace your steps and follow the paving back downhill around the curve of the nob, until you are about 300 yards short of the automotive barrier.

A sign indicates the footpath that goes downhill, the Marine View Trail, once part of an old dirt road. Take it through light chaparral, bearing consistently left until you have passed the big water tank, once scheduled to stand on top of the nob. Ignore the first two right forks downhill and continue on to the third, which zigzags in large, easy switchbacks to make for easier descent.

All too soon you will be back at the trailhead, wondering that this unspoiled, 237-acre chunk of precious land should have survived to become a place of relaxation and pleasure for the public on the Contra Costa shoreline.





Vincent, 70, maintains her devotion to preserving Richmond's environment

By Joe Pereira

Staff writer

RICHMOND — Every morning Barbara Vincent drives to the Plunge in Point Richmond to take a swim. It's her contribution to the environment. By swimming she stays healthy and keeping everything healthy — body, plants, water and air — is what an environmentalist is all about, reasons Vincent.

So it should come as no surprise that Vincent's name is well known among environmental groups such as the Sierra Club, Save the San Francisco Bay Association and Friends of Wildcat Canyon. She works with all of them.

Vincent's thinking goes like this: The marshlands of North Richmond must be protected from contamination because it is the start of the food chain. The crab lays its larvae, the larvae get eaten by fish, the fish get eaten by birds and so on. "Everything works in a complete cycle from the organism in the marshes to the food that is served on the table for dinner," she said.

Another motive underscores Vincent's participation in environmental issues. As a native Richmonder she likes to keep her hometown clean, she added. That's why when she is told she is difficult to reach she answers, "Oh if it's not one meeting it's another." At 70 she is off and running.

Vincent is currently attending public hearings on several issues.

She said she wants to ensure that the North Richmond Bypass, a highway cutting diagonally across from Pinole to the San Rafael Bridge, will not be built at the expense of San Pablo and Wildcat creeks, which run from the hills into the San Pablo Bay. "There use to be salmon in those creeks at one time. That was a long time ago," Vincent said.

She is also carefully watching the proposed development on Clark Road in El Sobrante near Wildcat Canyon Regional Park. "We want to preserve the open feeling of the park because when you're in the canyon you don't want to see all these houses appearing in the scene."

Vincent said she loves nature. Her love affair with it finds her driving down remote dilapidated streets whose signs have fallen off metal poles a long time ago.

"Do you know," she asked, "we have a boardwalk right here in Richmond. People may be amazed that we do. It's really hard to get to but it's there right on the beach."

Forty years ago Vincent was fighting to put footprints on the beaches of Richmond. Back then, she said, only 65 feet of Richmond's 33 miles of beachland was public property. Beachcombers would have been trespassing on private property almost anywhere by the water.

Through efforts of environmentalists, however, the public today has access to a majority of the waterfront. Several stretches, including Point Isabel, Point Molate, Marina Bay, Miller-Knox Park, Keller Beach and Point Pinole, have become favorite vistas for many local residents.

"There's nothing more beautiful than looking out at Mount Tamalpais from any of those points," Vincent said.

The panoramic view Richmond enjoys is someday going to turn some of the city's land into prime property, she predicted. "Our city leaders ought to capitalize on this inherent quality of Richmond and people will be beating a path to our door," she said.

Industry lining the shores, including the port of Richmond, doesn't have to be moved elsewhere for Richmond's to sparkle. "I don't think there's anything wrong with our manufacturing plants and service industry. They now have to conform to stringent standards set by governmental watchdog agencies," she said.

The Chevron Oil Refinery, for example, is a place Vincent sometimes escapes to at night. Specked with moon-like tungsten lamps, the plant is bathed in what Vincent calls "a fantasy land aura."

"Have you seen it at night? It's like a castle on a cloud in the sky."

Vincent doesn't mind being tagged an activist, a label that has been put on her by more conservative circles, she said. "I'm the first to admit I not your average fundamentalist Republican. But I sincerely feel that to change Richmond into a city we can be proud of takes eternal vigilance. I will probably not see the transformation in my lifetime. But I want to share the feeling of knowing that I played a small part in that change."

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Photography exhibitions: "Lowell: A Community of Workers,"
Lowell, MA 1981-1984 (travelling).
Fishermen by Trade: On San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers"
Richmond Museum, 1988.

Play: "Boomtown" based on the oral histories of shipyard
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